The spookiest magazine for ZX Spectrum enthusiasts

BREAK SPACE

Issue 3

the bleakest day autumn could muster

BEFORE YOU STANDS A DAUNTING VISTA; A PATH LEADS NORTH THROUGH THE EERIEST OF WOODS, PUMPKINS LIE SCATTERED TO THE SIDES OF THE PATH, ITSELF LEADING TO A FOREBODING CASTLE
BREAK SPACE HQ →

58 NEW Games reviewed!

Including :

Bubbleback

Cubix

Runaway Nose

Travel Unlimited

Castle Capers II

Gabriele Amore Interview

2 complete type-in games and expert BASIC coding tips

Crossword, Mail, POKEs, and more, PLUS...

The triumphant return of Phil South

Editorial

Like many drunks, cat owners and parents, there were points during this issue's creation where I thought "We should have stopped at two."

Which is not to say that I wasn't enjoying the process - the review team were crackling along, bolstered by not one, but two new arrivals. Talking to various contributors about incoming features and interviews was exciting! But, Man. 58 games. They just kept coming. 58 games worked out at 130 seperate opinions. That's a lot of work. Could we get everything done on time? Could the team keep up with the flood? Fair dues to them : they did. Kept up the quality and the pace, didn't grumble, stayed positive through a long September. A couple of reviews didn't get through for various reasons, but there's always Issue 4.

Hard work, then, but worth it in the end.

At 58 reviews and 124 pages, this is our biggest issue and, I think, the best by far. We have 2 BASIC type-ins, a 6-page interview/feature with indie developer Gabriele Amore, and a pair of fascinating postcards from the wider Spectrum culture from Grace E. and our own Andy.

And what about these new arrivals?

First, Jon responded to our call in Issue two, and sent us a sample review. A few days later, he was part of the crew and has slotted into the Towers perfectly.

And then Phil showed up, descending from the heavens on heavenly wings to impart his grace on the review crew. For those not in the know, Phil wrote for Your Spectrum / Your Sinclair during that magazine's manic heyday in the 80s, and for multiple games magazines thereafter. He brings a certain style to proceedings.

Enough waffle.
Thanks to you for downloading.
Happy Hallowe'en!

Mpk

Cover Notes

This month's cover is again by Kevin from **keezees.com**. The concept is a homage to a classic 1939 Wizard of Oz poster, with Dorothy and the gang heading towards the Emerald City. But instead, we have 4 characters from this month's reviewed games, on their way to BreakSpace H.Q.
Are they intending to request a boon from the wizards? 2 of them have guns, so I do hope so.

Are you funny, smart, literate? (Any 2 of 3)

Would you like to join the gang, and write for free about Speccy games?

Of course you do. Why wouldn't you?

Simply send us a writing sample, or feature proposal, or whatever.
Point your email at **BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com**

Operators are standing by.

Skeleton Crew

WooOOOoooOOOoooOOo! It's spooky season, and what could be more terrifying than this lot ?

It's only blimmin' Phil South. As a staffer on Your Sinclair at its peak, Phil was part of the finest Spectrum reviewing team ever assembled. And now, somehow, he's here, the Pelé to our New York Cosmos. We can barely believe it either. He probably won't stick around for long, so enjoy the touch of class while you can.
Fave Hallowe'en costume : Dressed as Captain Kirk dressed as Michael Myers. Meta.

3 months ago, new guy Jon was an unassuming reader just like you, but he submitted a sample review to our inbox and now look at him, bestriding the Earth like a Colossus.
Carpe Diem, baby.

Favourite Hallowe'en costume : A Wall St. Banker, aged 14. Not scary, but did get him served at Oddbins.

In August, bohemian rake Andy played Live beeper music using 2 Spectrums on stage before a paying audience. Legend. We've been scrambling around to find bootleg recordings of the event, like Grateful Dead fans in the 80s. No luck so far, but hopefully there's a shady guy selling tapes out of a briefcase at Crash Live.
Favourite Hallowe'en costume : Arthur from Ghosts'n'Goblins, in his heart-patterned pants.

Multi-talented Dave has been all over this issue. Reviewing, researching, interviewing, drawing cartoons...It's enough to raise the question of whether we need an editor at all.
Luckily, he knows that any revolutionary tendencies will be meet with the iron fist they deserve.

Favourite Hallowe'en costume : On page 13, Dave clarifies his position on 'fun'. So : Not Applicable.

Ladies' favourite Jamie still hasn't taken those sunglasses off, and he just turns his monitor brightness way up to compensate. The whole office is overrun by moths, but we can't stay mad at him.

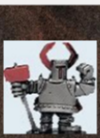
Fave Hallowe'en costume : A cowboy with fake moustache that somehow made him look like K.D.Lang. Something for everyone, eh, ladies?

Seasoned professional Shaun had to be physically restrained from reviewing everything this issue, such is his passion for Speccy games and the written word.

Favourite Hallowe'en costume : Aged 9, his mummy wrapped him in bogroll so he could be a Mummy. I hope it didn't rain.

Award-winning Sloany went on a gameshow in August, the BBC's The Tournament. He didn't win anything, but he's still smiling. At least he got to meet Alex Scott. That's something, right? He's also got a new game reviewed in this issue. It's quite good.

Fave Hallowe'en costume : Low-effort Shaun of the Dead zombie. He didn't look much different.



Dark overlord Mpk doesn't need to dress up on Hallowe'en. His terrifying visage makes every day a gruesome spookfest.
He will usually dress up the dog, if that counts.

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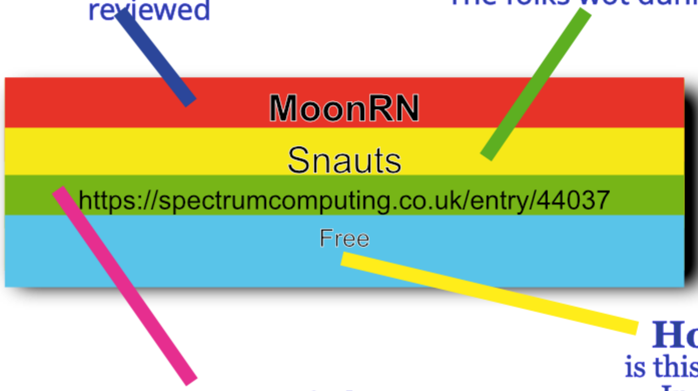
Review Header Explained

So, we have this colourful box at the top of every review. Just in case there's any confusion, here's what it all means.

The name of the game being reviewed

Publisher / Author The folks wot dunnit



How Much is this going to cost? In cases where there's a suggested but not compulsory Pay What You Want option, we list it as PWYW / £suggested

A Link to the game's entry on SpectrumComputing.co.uk
You'll find lots of data there, all sourced from the mighty ZXDB.
Sometimes the games are available to download directly from SC, but generally there will be a link to itch.io or wherever under the 'Related Links' section.

Review Policy

We cover each game on its own merits, and look for the positives. The majority of the games here are hobby projects. It would not be fair or useful to review such projects harshly.

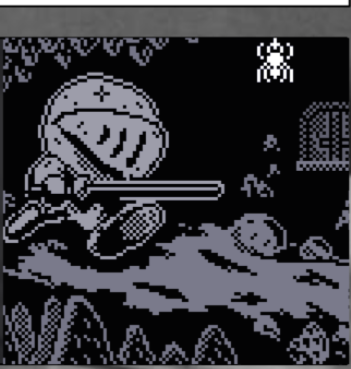
Each game will be reviewed by at least 2 reviewers, and given a fair assessment in its own context.

We don't award scores, but we do grant the coveted Break Space ACE award to the most deserving titles. Throughout all of history, only 13 games have attained this honour. Which games will join their ranks this issue?

The Haps

‘News’ that might have happened as much as 3 months ago. ‘Olds’, if you like.

Mushroom Soup Seasoned



Ottersoft’s charming debut, 2024 platformer Mushroom Soup, has gotten a makeover, with some new levels, a fix to how ladders work, and some new music.

https://ottersoft.itch.io/mushroom-soup ... -12-update

¿hablas español?

CAAD 68
REVISTA PARA AVENTUREROS
ULIO 2025
ANÁLISIS
Broken Sword
HADOW OF
E TEMPLARS
REFORGED
INFORME
reve historia de
VENTURAS AD

We certainly don’t, but somehow Mpk, Jamie and Dave have gotten their review of Issue 2 Ace *Echoes of the Future* into Spanish language adventure gaming magazine CAAD. Translated by the CAAD team, and due in Issue 69, which is out at about the same time as BreakSpace 3. Quite the honour!

https://caad.club/

Next Kickstarter goes Bonkers

Bonkers successful, that is.

The third and likely final ZX Spectrum Next Kickstarter closed out with over 2.6 million British Pounds pledged and over 7500 backers, making it the most successful retro gaming Kickstarter campaign ever.

As part of the campaign delivery, the Next will add official cores for Commodore 64, Sam Coupe and ZX81 as well as unofficial Amstrad CPC compatability. There are also 9 new games included, including Next remakes of Deathchase, Target Renegade and Automania. Tremendous, really.

https://www.specnext.com

Kevin Gets Steamy

Kevin Toms
LL STAR MA

That’s right, Kevin Toms is back at it, with his Football Star Manager released on Steam. It’s a spruced up version of the 1982 classic, and proudly feature-free, eschewing the complexities of the modern FM. For instance. players still only have 2 stats - Rating and Energy. But it’s as addictive as ever and runs a bit quicker than the original. Worth a peep. Snake Star Manager next, we hope.

https://store.steampowered.com/app/3707550/Kevin_Toms_Football_Star_Manager/

It’s fun to play at the Y.R.G.B.

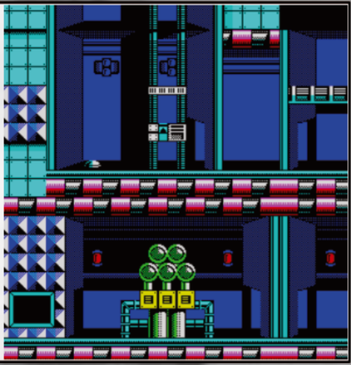
The annual YRGB contest wrapped up in August, with 15 high-quality entries. Cubix won the Public Vote, as well as judges’ awards for Gameplay and Sound. Asymetry narrowly blocked a clean sweep by claiming the Graphics award.

https://yrgb.org/

Let’s all meet up in Map 2000

Over on the fabulous Spectrum Screenshot Map site, host Pavero has just posted his 2000th map. And that’s not 2000 for the site either - there are over 3200 there in total, with Pavero personally providing 2000 of them. Gold Star for him. Looks like the bi-millenial map was a (spoilery) overview of Runaway Nose. The map for Daley Thompson’s Decathalon is our favourite.

https://maps.speccy.cz/



A z80 by any other name…

Yes, look, you can buy an official Spectrum fragrance. And ZX80 (for women) and ZX81 versions. We’re just slightly disappointed that the C-64 one doesn’t smell like bread. The perfect gift for someone you maybe don’t like all that much. They only ship in the UK. Finally, an upside to Brexit.

https://auk.direct/exclusive-cosmetics-fragrances/

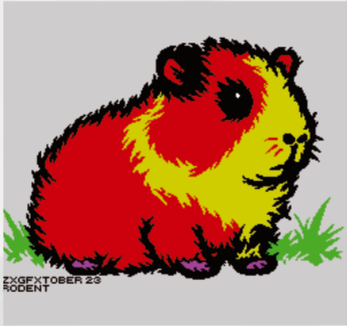
The Spectrum
Fragrance
POUR HOMME
EAU DE TOILETTE
VAPORISATEUR
NATURAL SPRAY
100ml
The Spectrum
Fragrance
POUR HOMME
EAU DE TOILETTE

Your Skills of an Artist

We all enjoy a bit of visual art, and for Spectrum art there’s nowhere better to rest your eyeballs then ZXArt.ee. And there’s no *when* better than right now, as they are running their annual ZXGFXTOBER event.

There’s a theme every day, artists (including you, if you like) submit their SCREEN$, everyone has a good time. Be careful though, many of the submissions are not work-safe. More innocently : check out this guinea pig!

zxart.ee



YS Classic t-shirt recreated

Nostalgia ain’t what it used to be, but still - remember when Your Sinclair did that cool, weird t-shirt with all the angular images on it? It was crap, obviously, but in a funky, skillo kind of way. Etc.

Anyway, friend of the magazine and general all-round Speccy legend Phil South has been up to some detective work and found a clean image of it, and now you can buy one to hide your shame. As evidenced to the right, in-house model Sloany bought one, and he’s Award-Winning. Sorry, ladies, Jamie declined to model for us.

https://www.redbubble.com/people/philsouth/shop

Cubix

Gogin

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44487

Free

Cubix is a jaw-dropping achievement, but from Gogin, the developer behind 2022's *Nothing**, can we expect anything less?

It's a truth often forgotten: technical prowess alone means nothing if the gameplay and experience don't shine. Coding skill and game design are distinct disciplines. A brilliant programmer doesn't automatically make a brilliant game. *Nothing* was a programming tour de force that defied expectations of what was possible on the ZX Spectrum, blending fluid gameplay with modern indie sensibilities - a rare feat on the platform. If you haven't played it, consider this your sign. I can't recommend it enough.

With Cubix, the developer returns with another indie-inspired marvel, this time reimagining the game Fez. The concept is a tall order for the humble Spectrum: platforming action on a 3D, cube-like map that forces the player to think in three dimensions to solve its 2D puzzles. Astonishingly, Cubix doesn't just pull it off, it excels.

The gameplay revolves around scaling a 3D tower level by level. As you move toward the edges of the screen, the cube rotates smoothly, revealing enemies, platforms, and secrets on adjacent faces before you scroll onto the new plane. The effect is buttery smooth and technically impressive. But the central question is whether this cool visual stunt actually extends the gameplay?

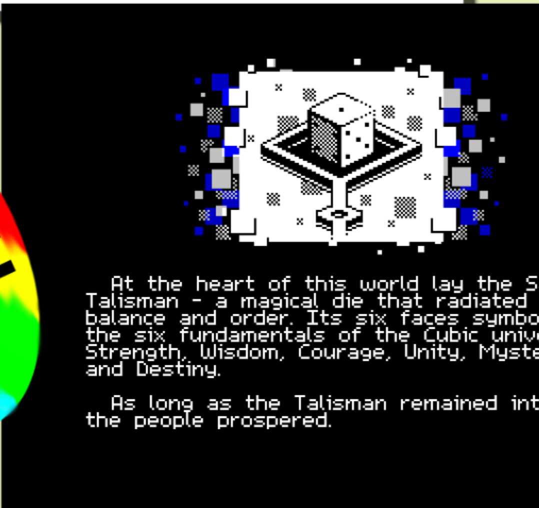
The answer is a resounding yes: it is fundamental. This mechanic transforms Cubix from a simple platformer into a clever puzzle game. The ability to peek around corners is essential for survival, allowing you to scout enemies and plan your route. More importantly, progression itself is the puzzle. You must observe out-of-reach areas, mentally unpack the cube's layout, and think in true 3D to advance. The central mechanic is not just impressive, it is genuinely enhancing and core to the experience. Think of it as a more contemplative, modern take on Nebulus, with a cube instead of a cylinder and you're not far off.

Of course, a masterpiece on the Spectrum wouldn't be complete without iconic audio, and Cubix delivers. The music is a glorious celebration of the AY chip's unique character: those glassy, crystalline tones that cut through with sharp clarity. While (and this is a personal choice) benchmarks like The Light Corridor, Toobin, or Tetris mastered this sound, Cubix wields it with equal skill. It's in those sharp, digital, almost fragile textures, where the AY's lack of filtering becomes its greatest strength, that it ironically outshines even the SID chip in this small and specific niche way, producing a sound that is pure, piercing, and unmistakably Spectrum.

With six large, challenging levels to explore, Cubix has it all. Vibrant, shimmering music complements an incredible technical achievement. It's a game that feels authentically 3D, built on a foundation of exciting and novel gameplay that only its unique mechanic could provide. It is, without a doubt, a must-play for any fan of the Spectrum, retro gaming, or ingenious game design. Gogin has done it again.

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/37008/ZX-Spectrum/Nothing

Break Space Ace



At the heart of this world lay the S
Talisman - a magical die that radiated
balance and order. Its six faces symbo
the six fundamentals of the Cubic univ
Strength, Wisdom, Courage, Unity, Myste
and Destiny.

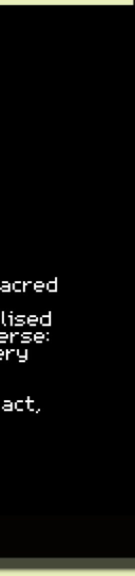
As long as the Talisman remained int
the people prospered.

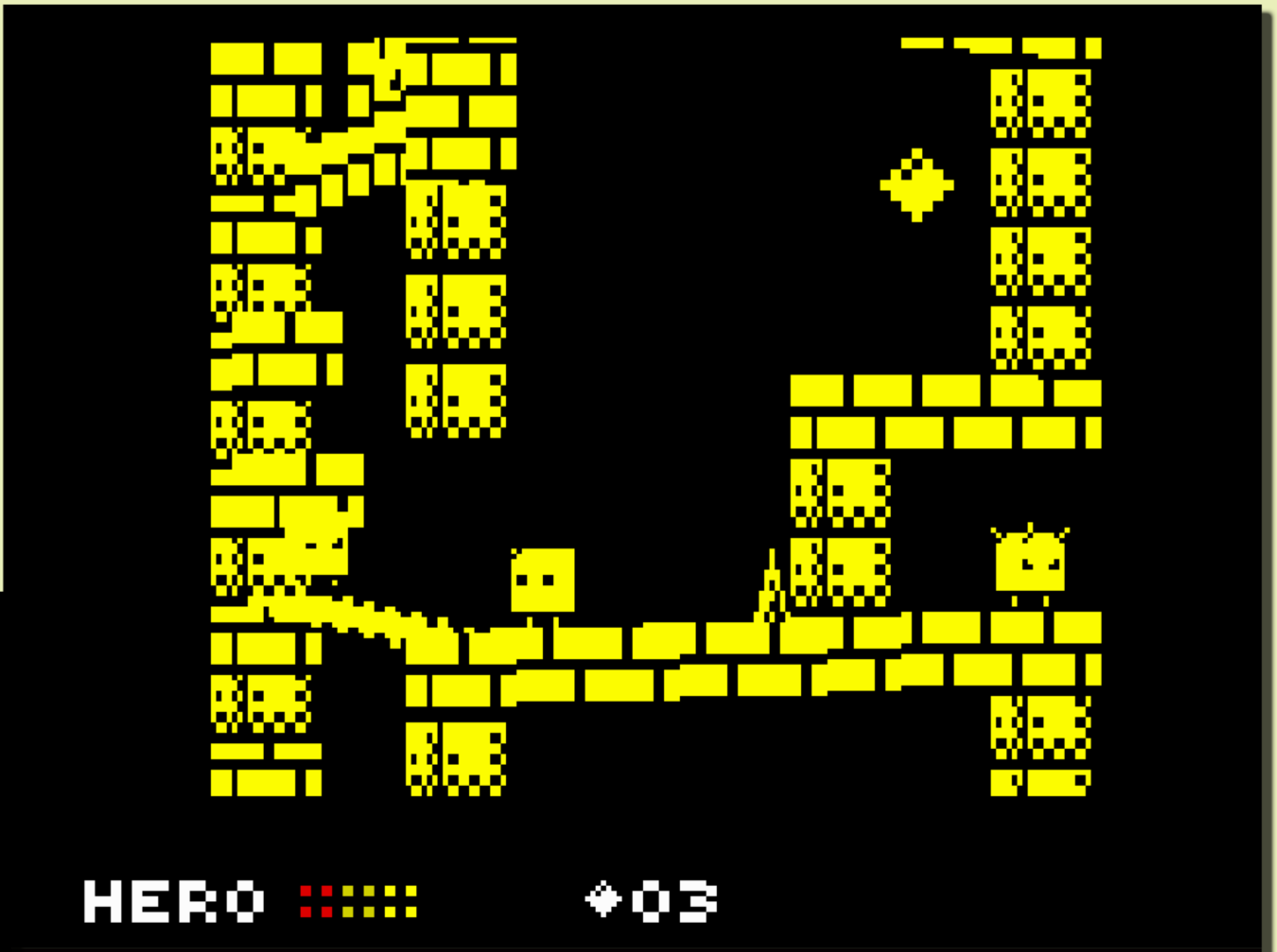
Should be fine then.

Fezzes are cool. You know this to be true. I tell you what else, that old Steam game Fez was very cool. And not for nuthin' but those games like Nebulus which used 3D to make a tower platformer, they were cool like ze cucumber.

Coming back to the Speccy after so many years in the woods a while back, I was struck by how advanced modern ZX games are. Cubix is an ideal example of this. It's smooth, it's deep, and yes Paul, it's a lot like making love to a beautiful woman. Initially it fools you into thinking it's a bog standard little platform game, until, that is, you hit a 3D cube and all of a sudden you shift from a 2D to a 3D world. The doors to perception thus opened, it turns before your blinking eyeballs into a much better game. I swore loudly when that happened.

You take the role of a jaunty little cuboid whose job is to scale a tall tower by jumping to higher platforms, occasionally bumping into enemies, and picking up blocks and carrying them to new locations. Moving the character around is a delightful experience, fluid and entertaining. The character has momentum. Subtle squash and stretch of the character's body gives it lots of life and makes the movement feel more responsive.





Actual Spectrum screenshot, honest

At first you do too much, putting way too much gas into every jump and overshooting your target. After a while you settle down and realise not for the first time in your life that "less is more". You have to get into a rhythm, learn the muscle memory of the subtle "flip" which hops you to a higher platform.

The puzzle elements kick in when you start lifting blocks to use them as step ladders, barriers for enemies etc. It's hard, it's not a pushover in any way, but it is enjoyable. I did manage to get myself stuck on the first playthrough and I couldn't advance in any direction, which I didn't like. It's possible I was lacking some crucial information about the possibilities for advancement, or missed an obvious exit. I am a bit of a clown like that, to be fair.

I do think these kinds of games are best though when you go in cold and have to learn the world, the moves and the tricks to get past obstacles yourself, rather than relying on documentation to hold your hand (very tightly, sorry can't stop myself).

The puzzles are hard, the average playing time is long, but the journey is amiable and fun. Top game! Like the hair of the girl you liked in school, it smells like sugared almonds and victory.

There has been so much buzz around this game in the Speccy scene. Jaws have been dropped, picked up and dropped once again for good measure.

Although Flavor Flav once sang "don't, don't, don't believe the hype", that's probably because Public Enemy's Clown Prince of Hip Hop never played anything like this on a humble ZX Spectrum.

The beauty of Fez was that it had all the playability of a classic 8-bit platformer, but possessed snazzy effects and mechanics that just couldn't be performed on those machines of yesteryear : Well. just as he did with *Nothing*, Sergei Smirnov has pulled off the seemingly impossible.

Cubix ain't just a fancy tech demo, it plays every bit as good as it looks. Serious platforming chops are required to navigate the spectacular rotating rooms that contain some devilishly fiendish puzzles; it's harsh but fair in the way that all the best games are.

In short, this is one cool cube, yeah, boyeeeeee!

Svellas

Inufuto

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44508

Free

"Who was that masked man?" That's what someone would inevitably say at the end of TV's "The Lone Ranger". I find myself asking a similar question about the mysterious Japanese game dev, Inufuto. When Inufuto releases a new game, he tends to unleash it on many, many formats, including everything from the Toshiba Pasopia T100 to the good old ZX Spectrum. How does he do it and why? Nobody knows (or maybe they do and I just haven't done my research properly. That might be it.)

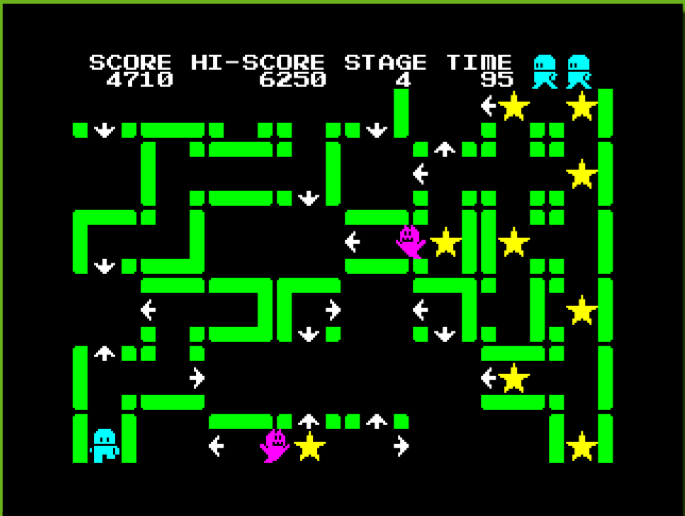
In any case his latest creation, Svellas, is another single screen arcade caper. The object of the game is to guide a little fella who bears an uncanny likeness to a cyan version of Mr Chips from TV's "Catchphrase" (I'm just saying what I see) around a series of mazes, collecting stars and avoiding baddies.

So far, so Pacman. However as with his previous games Inufuto keeps things interesting by introducing an unusual mechanic (and I don't mean Kevin Webster from TV's "Coronation Street").

In order to move around the maze, you must help our cyan hero engage in a bit of wall rearrangement. Pushing certain blocks with arrows allows access to previously unreachable areas and can also be used to trap baddies. In doing so, you need to be careful that you don't end up getting yourself cornered or it's goodnight Mr Chips!

Just to add to our pal's woes, when the magenta ghosties are trapped, they can turn into see-through cyan ghosts that can float through walls. And if that wasn't enough, you also have to contend with a depleting timer.

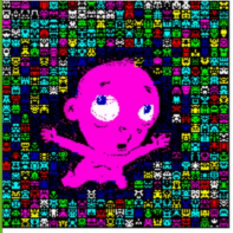
Once you've navigated this, it's a case of collecting the stars and on to the next level. There's a lot of strategic puzzling required, especially from about level 4 onwards. It's not a complicated game by any means. The sound is minimal, with functional effects and an ear shattering tune that plays before each level, very reminiscent of the Speccy's early days.



Watch Mr Chips. What's he doing?

The simplicity of the game not only allows it to be ported to a billion systems but also provides for satisfying, honest to goodness gameplay in its purest form, without the need for bells and whistles.

I'm off to dig out my Master System and Everdrive and check out the SG-1000 version.



The oddly and inexplicably named 'Svellas' is Inufuto's twentieth release for the ZX-Spectrum. A few of their games are clones of well-known licences like Battle City and Mr Do!, but most seem to be original ideas merely inspired by the spirit of early arcade games in general. I assume Svellas falls into this latter category (though please do write in if I'm wrong).

Whatever its provenance, this whole 'moving bits of the maze around like tectonic plates' is a really neat idea. The screens range from puzzle-heavy mazes to very open collect-em-ups. There are only eight levels, which then cycle with more ghosts, and a more aggressive chasing behaviour. So the 3 lives you get seems fair on the player, yet would still rake in plenty of coins if it was an arcade cabinet.

There's no clear difficulty gradient over the 8 stages, and the best levels are the mazes, with the simpler arcadey ones providing a palate cleanser inbetween. The routes you take can open or close others, and even trap you, so you need to consider the whole screen and learn the mechanic well.

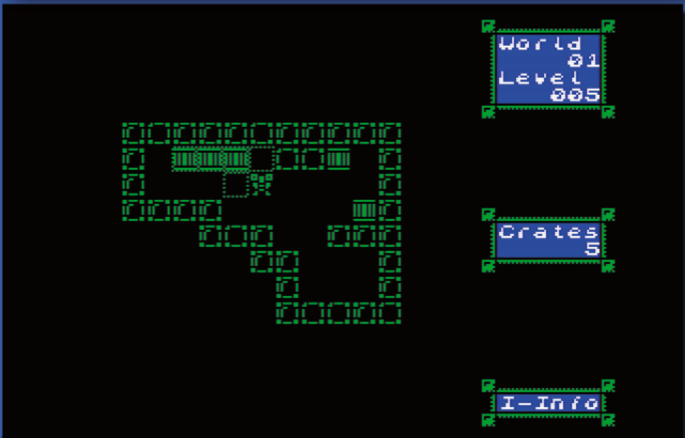
This is a fun game, but I feel it's an idea that could have been explored more thoroughly. Mind you, it's understandable that time for level design is limited when you're catering for a whopping one hundred and thirteen different systems. I'm about as likely to go to a county cricket match as play a game on the FX-9000P, but in both cases I'm glad they exist and there are stalwart types like Inufuto out there keeping things alive.

Soko1000

Serdjuk

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44526

PWYW / $1



Messed up again

Let's get this out of the way: Soko1000 is just another Sokoban clone; let me briefly explain the premise. This is a grid-based, two dimensional game in which you move in one of four directions only. The object is to manoeuvre one or more boxes or crates to a specific highlighted square in each level. Crates may only be pushed, and not pulled, and only one at a time at that. It requires enough space (at least one square) on each opposite side to the direction that you want to move a crate; if you want to move a crate to the one space to the right, you need at least one accessible block to the immediate left of it. Makes sense? Good.

I remember quite a few of this sort of thing on the old Speccy, and at least one on the monochrome monolith that is the ZX81. There are some good implementations out there for sure. This one isn't bad either, although it's not going to win any prizes for its functional graphics and sparse in-game sound effects. The loading screen and the accompanying beeper music are rather spiffy, mind. This sort of game doesn't need much flash anyway.

There are some rudimentary options in game: you may toggle between smooth, pixel movements, or single block movements for speed, and change the pixel colours from the black background to your taste. And there are, as its name suggests, 1,000 levels to play through, separated into 10 "worlds", with simple but slightly varied graphics for each of these worlds. Each level or world may be played in any order, and you may save your progress too. Which is nice.

I've not played any Sokoban variants for a long time, and seemed to have forgotten the strategy, getting stuck for too long on the second level of the first world. But I finally worked it out, and never gave up even when my mind was telling me that it wasn't possible. I just didn't see the obvious and felt a bit stupid when I finally cracked it.

I quite like this release, though I do think a "step" counter and time limit, or at least a timer, would have made Soko1000 shine so much more. Nonetheless, there's a lot of game here, with some devilish challenges. It's one for the brainy kids, so go test your grey matter and wits with this solid release.

The name says it all. Soko 1000. It's not just a title, it's a warning. A promise. A preview of the vacant, shell-shocked expression: the Soko 1000-yard stare that will soon be permanently etched onto your face.

The descent into this particular madness begins deceptively. A phenomenal 48K beeper track pulses with deceptive energy, accompanied by flashy border effects. It's a glorious, upbeat anthem for the monumental task ahead. I listened to it on a loop, not yet realising it was the soundtrack to my own cognitive overload.

This is a Sokoban game of pure, uncut scope. One thousand levels. The game presents them to you all at once, a vast, open-plan labyrinth of crates and corridors. It's a brilliant, brutal design. You are not led gently from one puzzle to the next. You are simply deposited at the edge of a vast mental frontier and handed a map with a thousand points of interest.

You can try to explain the late-game logic to a friend. The sheer depth of its devious design. But they won't get it. And in that moment, you'll understand. You'll just shake your head, a distant look in your eyes, and mutter: "You don't know, man. You weren't there."

Because that's the true divide Soko 1000 creates. There are two types of people: those who have seen it through to the end, and those who simply do not know.

The game knows what it's doing to you. It offers small mercies. An undo button, though it only rewinds a single move, feels like a life preserver tossed into a churning ocean. The 'R' key to restart is your only true reset, a chance to blink away the stare and try to refocus.

Soko 1000 is more than a game, it's an endurance test. It's a polished, deep-cut experience that separates the casual players from the vacant-eyed devotees. You come for the awesome music, but you stay until you've achieved the stare - that blank, thousand-yard gaze of someone who has seen too many crates and not enough solutions.
It's a masterpiece of its kind. I'd recommend it, but I'm not sure you'd understand. You weren't there.

La Pirámide de Xaltocan

Victor Costas

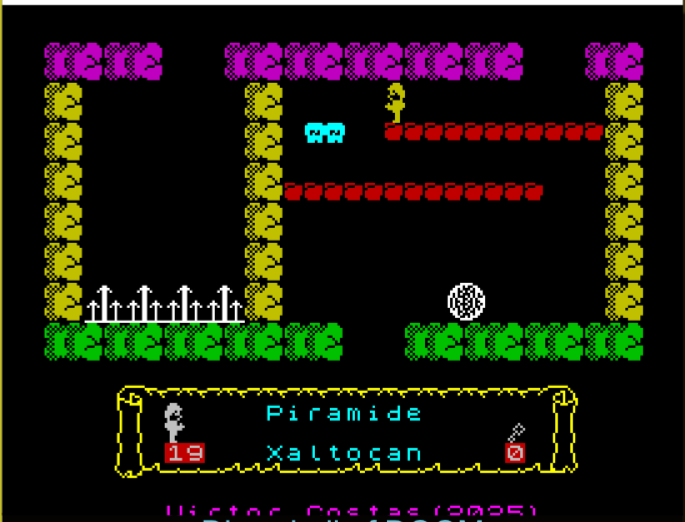
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44509

Free

1985 – what a time to be alive! Careless Whisper was topping the charts, Back to the Future was lighting up the cinemas, Elite was blowing minds on the ZX Spectrum — and amongst all this and hovering under the radar was Abu Simbel Profanation, a game that has since gone down as one of the hardest Speccy titles ever made.

1985 also just so happens to be the setting for La Pirámide de Xaltocan by Víctor Fco Costas, which plays as a love letter to Abu Simbel Profanation. In this one, you play a fearless explorer (aren't they all?) trapped inside a vast pyramid. Your quest is to traverse 45 chambers and collect the sacred keys that unlock the door to freedom — all while avoiding giant spiders, hungry piranhas, and poisoned arrows!

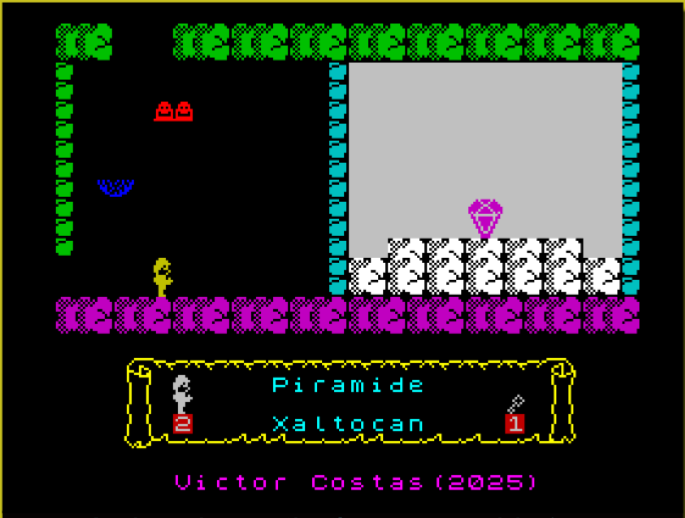
After the gorgeous loading screen, you're greeted by the main menu (in Spanish, but be not afeard, for I shall render it into the English tongue for thee). Option 1 gives a preview of all 45 chambers, each displayed on-screen for a few seconds one by one - so avoid that if you hate spoilers!. Option 2 launches the main game. It's keyboard-only, with four controls: LEFT, RIGHT, SHORT JUMP, and LONG JUMP.



Disco ball of DOOM

You start with 20 lives — which seems like a lot, but at less than half a life per screen, is nowhere near enough! Like its inspiration, this game is brutally tough. But that's exactly the point, and therein lies its charm. The question is: do you have what it takes to push through?

As soon as I got to screen 2 my self-satisfaction was short-lived as I found myself in an infinite death loop. Persevering, my next challenge was getting past the giant disco-ball on screen 3 (at least, I think it was a disco-ball… what such a thing is doing inside a centuries-old pyramid is anyone's guess). After 30+ attempts, and with the help of save states (yes, I'm a cheat), I had to admit defeat. The pyramid had won. The problem is - the enemies move at a fair-old pace, while the plucky little chap you control trudges along like he's wading through treacle.



As jewels go, that's a proper big 'un.

If I had any hair, this game would have had me pulling it out - but I can't be critical of a game which shows this much ingenuity written purely in basic. It really is a fantastic achievement.

So, if you're craving a real challenge, give it a go — and see if you can outdo my feeble effort!

Victor. Buddy. What are you doing to me? I'm just trying to have a little fun here, and you've done this.

Did it have to be this difficult? Did it have to have two types of jump? Did it have to be this weird?

Of course it did. What's the point of making a game like everyone else's?

Challenge one in this is figuring out how the movement works. It's in BASIC, and it's a bit clunky, and the jumps don't work at all like you'd expect initially. The player and the enemies seem to run on a different cycle as well, so timing when to move is something to be learned anew, complicated again by the 2 types of jump.

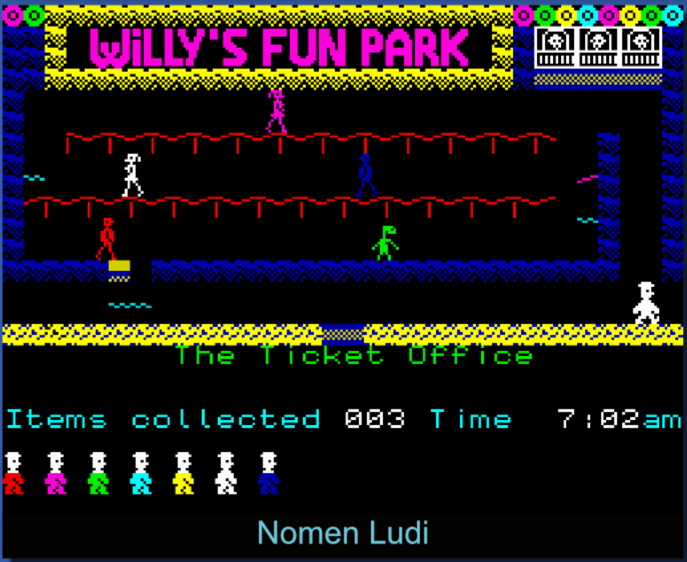
But learning how to do a thing and then doing it is kind of what games are about, and there's enough variety here to keep it fresh for a while. Still very hard though, but it sticks to its own rules and you can in fact get better at it with a little patience. While I am not likely to finish it anytime soon, I got to 31%, which is much better than Jon, and that's what really counts.

Welcome to Willy's Fun Park!

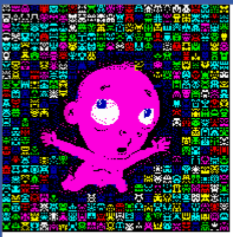
Hervé Ast

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44467

Free



Nomen Ludi



Hervé Ast appeared on the JSW modding scene in 2005 with the 240 room epic 'Jet Set Willy in Paris'. A productive couple of years and three more games followed, the last of which saw 'Willy in the Islands of Mystery', and possibly Hervé went there with him, because he didn't release another speccy game for 18 years!

If he was stranded on a desert island for the best part of two decades, he didn't spend his time moping about forming unsavoury relationships with volleyballs. He put it to good use perfecting his skillz with the JSW Editor, specifically 'JSW64 Variant Z', which supports more guardians & blocks per room, and more block types like switches, trampolines and crumbling blocks (none of which are in the original JSW). All this allows screens to be more fleshed-out and varied in both graphics & gameplay, with the only trade-off being a bit of slowdown on the busiest screens.

'Welcome To Willy's Fun Park' sees our hero in a familiar predicament in an unfamiliar place: Willy owns a massive funfair and must tidy it up before Maria lets him drive home, presumably to a mansion that also needs decluttering. The intro eases you in with calming notes of 'Over the Waves', and once the game starts you're struck by colour and sound — as any good funfair should. The AY rendition of 'Itsy Bitsy Teeny Weeny Yellow Polka Dot Bikini' is suitably zany, and you can mute it before it drives you full-on Timmy Mallet bonkers.

Not being particularly partial to fun, I've never been to a fun park. But that doesn't mean I can't appreciate the Ferris wheel, merry-go-round, candy floss & test your strength machine in the game. Some of the screens are especially creative, with some clearly crafty stuff going on to make them possible. The roller coaster deserves a round of applause—it'll give you more than you bargained for. The same goes for when you meet the Wise Man, but without giving too much away, it's in a slightly more sinister fashion.

Thankfully this is not an 'advanced' JSW game. It's hard, but not absurdly hard. I'd still say to play with snapshots or infy lives (35899,0) just so you can see more scenery. Though even without those crutches you've got a chance of completing it, and it shouldn't take 18 years. Willy's Fun Park does indeed have all the fun of the fair, and it's heartening for lapsed developers like me to see this author come back with such verve & vision after a long hiatus.

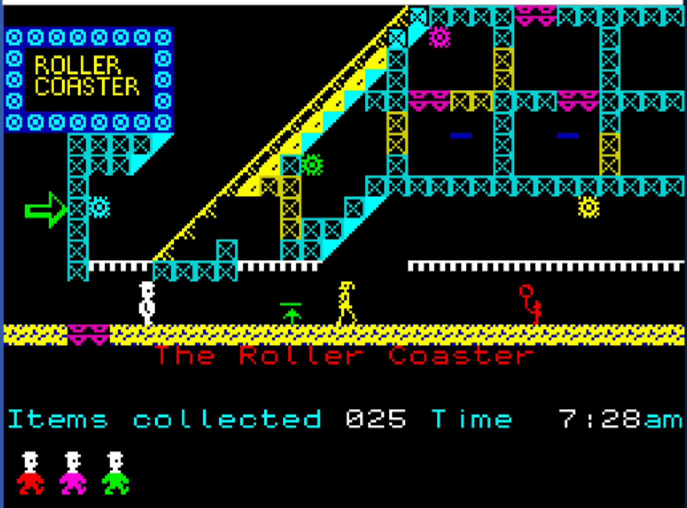
Finding out that Dave doesn't like fun puts an interesting slant on his reviews, don't you think? We'll have to keep that in mind. Without triggering yet another tiresome 'Are Games Art?'* debate, surely the main point of games is to provide fun?

Of course they bloody are, if they want to be.

But, of course, Dave is referring to the outdoors, thrill-ride kind of fun with candy floss and nausea and getting seagulls stuck in your teeth on the big dipper. Which is defensible enough. I, in contrast, love to spend my summer days in the park with my legs in the air, completely out of control.

WtWFP, then - is that any fun? Yeah, funnily enough. It's tough, but not murderously so, and there are some cool effects that use all the extra features of the engine. JSW mechanics are present and correct, comfortable like an favourite old jacket and the levels are clever and colourful enough to keep you exploring.

But yeah, infinite lives for this one, for sure. And turn off the blimmin' music.



My stomach's performing a quirkafleeg

ANDREW RYALS'

HACK PACK

Hello again!

Well that was a little weird seeing some pokes in print again after all these years. Did you like them?

OMG, time soon flies by and before you know it you have the editor gently prodding you with a manky C64 wanting new pokes for the latest and greatest productions for the wee rubber key wonder. I've probably missed a game out, but not on purpose! Please write in and let me know if I've missed anything. I have not bothered with some games such as Sokoban 1000 as there is nothing to hack and many of the basic games.

One of the real cool things about the Speccy is its past. We always seem to find new missing in action (MIA) games, and Interceptor is one that I found just before it was ready to submit my pokes for publication. It's available over on the Planet Sinclair website.

Asymettry

26898,x	x=lives

Boni in Bat Hell!

27396,0	Infinite lives

Boni 2 - Return to Bat Hell

30617,0	Infinite lives
48198,x	x=lives

Castle Capers II

32028,x	x=lives
32035,x	x=tiles
32048,x	x=time

Chernobyl

24610,x	x=lives

Chuckie Mail

27990,0	Infinite lives
36269,x	x=lives

DS Bodyguard

48561,0	Infinite lives
24746,x	x=lives

Ecclesia

37341,0	Infinite lives
24614,x	x=lives

Escape from Twilight Castle

39495,0	Infinite time
41129,0	Infinite lives

Explorer

32028,x	x=lives

Galacic Nexus

60751,x	x=lives

Hammer Knight

36532,0	Infinite lives
58073,x	x=lives

Hit the Fan - Crash version

48429,x	x=lives

Hit the Fan - 48k / 128k version

27990,0	Infinite lives
48429,x	x=lives

Interceptor

33570,x	x=lives

King Kong pt 1

24608,x	x=lives

Little John Can't Jump

46601,x	x=lives

Maisie Day Not Okay

51669,x	x=lives
51673,x	x=keys

Mega Serpiente

49901,0	Infinite lives
52622,0	Infinite time
33938,x	x=lives
33939,x	x=fruit
33941,x	x=time

Re-Bearded Fantasy

37338,0	Infinite lives
24616,x	x=lives

Sam's Ashes Nightmare

27019,0	Infinite lives
34257,x	x=lives

Svellas

24837,0	Infinite lives
24810,0	Infinite time
34565,x	x=lives
34567,x	x=time

Sam's Ashes Nightmare

37448,0	Infinite lives
24608,x	x=lives

The Vinyl Countdown

37448,0	Infinite lives
24608,x	x=lives

Travel Unlimited

44549,x	x=time

Willy's Fun Park

34252,x	x=lives

ZXnake 2

60512,x	x=lives

Bubbleback v1.02

(Yes, you need all of them)

28255,0	Infinite energy
28070,0	
25833,0	
26652,0	
28364,0	
28637,0	
30304,0	

As ever, you can deploy the POKEs using a Multiface on real hardware, or in your emulator as appropriate.

In Fuse, for instance, the dialog is under Machine…Poke Memory. Pop the Address and Value in there, e.g. for Svellas infinite lives, the Address is 24837 and the Value is 0

You may want to then consider saving a fresh snapshot so that you don't need to re-enter it whenever you load that game.

Happy hacking.

Kubanoid

Stardust

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44493

Free

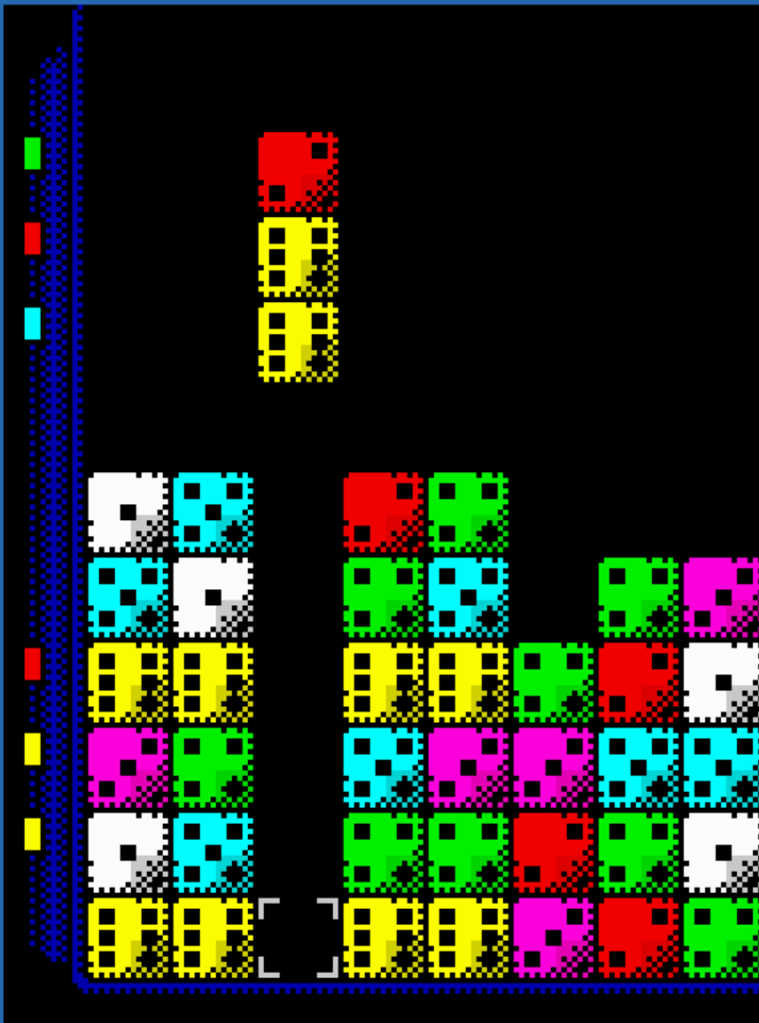
Columns was Sega's answer to Tetris, a puzzle game popularised throughout the world (or at least the world outside of the old USSR) thanks to a green screen portable games console released in 1989. You should know what I'm talking about. The Speccy, along with other 8-bit computers, saw their own version of Tetris thanks to Mirrorsoft, but I don't recall an official version of Columns. There were some post-commercial efforts, the best of these being either Bob Smith's rather spiffy Dominetris variant, or Computer Emuzone's 2005 ZX Columns for the 128K machines.

Sticking pretty faithfully to the original game, there are three stacked dice, each coloured according to the face shown (1 white, 2 red, 3 purple, 4 green, 5 cyan and 6 yellow). You may rearrange these stacks up or down, so from bottom to top: 1, 2, and 4, pushing up makes this 4, 1, and 2 (and down 2, 4 and 1).

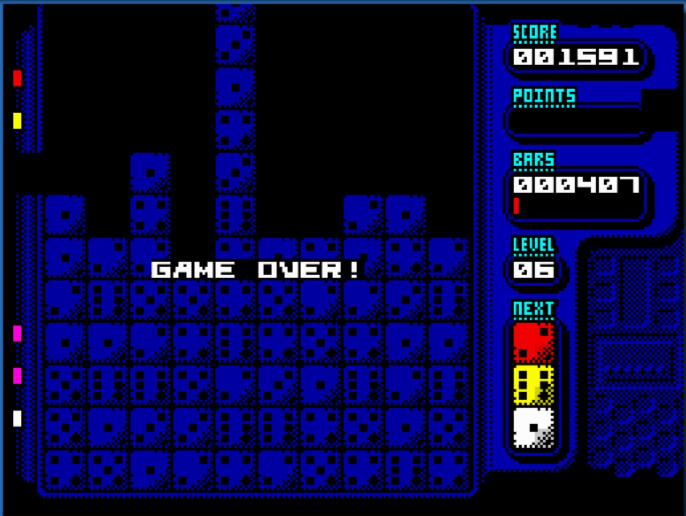
Each stack slowly proceeds downwards to the level floor, and you may drop each column (ah, so that's why the original concept was called Columns, I get it now) quickly with the fire button. An optional targeting square shows your current final destination, which aids your placement optimally.

The issues I have with the game are due to its original design and not this version in particular; whilst I enjoy playing Kubanoid, it doesn't hold my attention for too long like Tetris would. After a while, when the playing well is cluttered, I feel that luck is guiding me, and not judgement. Translated: I'm not very good at it! The best player of Columns I ever saw was my former esteemed colleague from Retro Gamer, Aaron Birch. He was always pure skill at any Columns-type game. I tried to observe his strategy but I just didn't get it (even after he tried to explain it to me).

Kubanoid is probably the best Columns clone on the Speccy to date, with nice music, great presentation and lovely colourful graphics. Although I can never formulate a good strategy to progress too far (even with the aid of numbered and coloured blocks), it's a great, progressive challenge that'll keep your mind sharp and entertained. Not quite a big thumbs up, but a thumbs up nonetheless.



Choices, choic

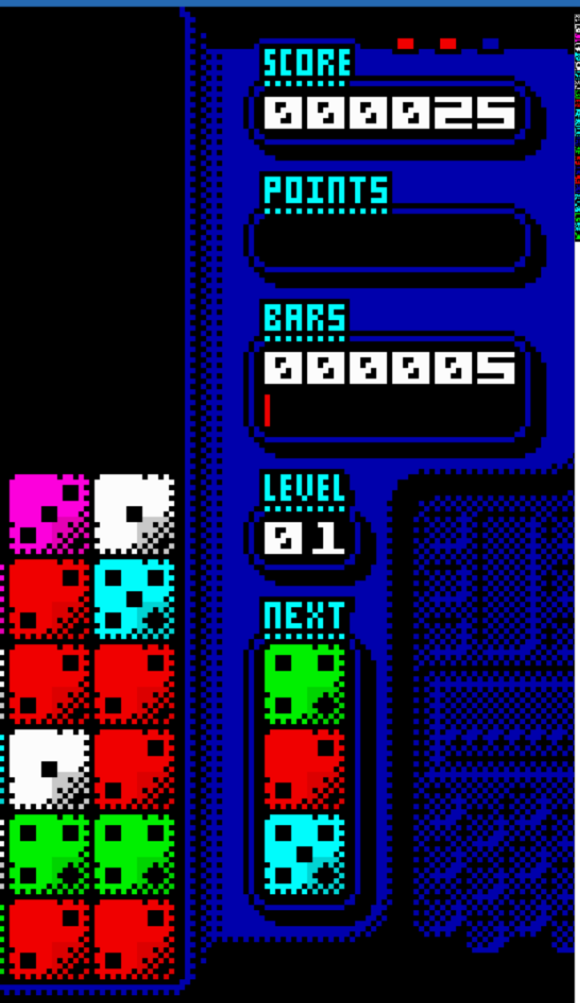


It *was* always looking dicey

Prior Art

Stardust have only one other game to their credit, 2022's Wordle, which, while a nicely presented Wordle, was never going to set the word on fire.

What the team *does* have to its credit though, is a series of very impressive scene demos. These run in TR-DOS (which is one for the Glossary) and you can pick them up from SC at this link : https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/list?label_id=0018828
Or, just watch them on Youtube. Here's Elysium State, which features some proper boggling effects : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEOv-OCil58



es…

Don't think I didn't see that—you rolled your eyes and said, 'but do we really neeeed another Columns clone?'. First—less of the chin music thankyouverymuch, and second—yes we do, or rather the Speccy does. There are some reasonable ones and some excellent variants (so I'm with Shaun re: Dominetris), but we're lacking a standout version of classic Columns. With that hinterland, Kubanoid seems all the more impressive for getting the fundamentals right.

It's highly polished, but the author has remembered this is a game and not a scene demo. It's common for such ported games to be pimped to absurdity: having options you'll never use, overstimulated happy hardcore, and animated UI's that do everything except enhance the playing experience. Kubanoid simply nails the mechanics of drop and control, and presents it well.

However, it's not perfect. The slow ramp in difficulty isn't a problem once you learn to score fast, but before that you feel like you're being let off too easily. There's also a bug that results in graphics being corrupted outside the play area. It's not a showstopper, but it niggles every game.

The best feeling in the world (well, top 3 at least) is when you get a chain reaction going: thud, thud, thud, thud. I think I had 10 in a row once. I wish I could say I planned it that way. The best strategy I found was to set up lots of staggered diagonals and cross my fingers.

It's deceptive though. Each time I think I'll be able to play forever, but somewhere around level 8, it starts to get on top of me. A few small recoveries follow, but slowly & surely, I'm confronted by a big blue wall of dice and a 'Game Over' screen.

My highest score so far is 3348 / level 9. That takes an hour, yet feels like 10 minutes. Kubanoid is a slow burner. Kubanoid is the Bolero. Kubanoid is the best version of Columns on the ZX-Spectrum.

This is not your nan's Tetris. This is Tetris on acid. In other words it stares at a piece of fruit for nine hours. No, no, what I mean is it's colourful, mind boggling and much like your nan it can be both boring and surprising by turns. Also it has a faint aroma of cabbage. *(Editor's Note : it appears that Phil has never played Columns. But he seems happy, so let's let him carry on)*

The deal here is that each block which falls is a set of three coloured dice, and you can set the landing position as they fall by moving left and right, and move the colour order of the dice by moving up and down. Shifting the colours in the stack means that when the dice (dies) land they line up with existing colours on the growing slush pile on the bottom.

Three-in-a-row up/down, left/right or diagonally causes them to vanish and the remaining blocks fall in to fill the gaps. If this makes any more three-in-a-rows, they too vanish until it's settled. Repeat until bonkers.

The Tetris gods are not kind, ever, and this incarnation of the falling blocks game is no exception. It's one of the crueller gods, the one who has girls draped around him on his throne and barely seems to be paying attention to your game. But then he shouts ALL PURPLE AND MUCH FASTER without warning. Thou art cruel, my lord.

The production design of the game is excellent. I'm known for my love of 128k music and this is no exception. The music which plays throughout is jolly without being repetitive and annoying. Privately I always thought the Speccy should have had an AY chip from the get-go, as almost all games are better for the addition of good sound. That said I do have a certain luddite nostalgia for the old fashioned 48k sound of two crickets being farted on while Tuvan throat singing.

It's not an easy game, in truth. Sure it's easy to get started, but it's not easy to get good. With the original Tetris you have one piece to position and drop. With Kubanoid you have that, plus an additional layer of cognitive gymnastics to deal with and you really have to stick the landing each time. It's like being asked to do a handful of Rubik's cube while having your hair cut by a slowly lowering ceiling fan. It's like trying to find somewhere to be intimate on a camping trip. It can be (wait for it)… intense.

Taking all of that into account Kubanoid is a challenging game which enlivens your sleepy brain cells and twitchy thumbs. It can also be a terrifying swan dive into a world of pain, in a cosy casual gaming kind of way.

Issue Three Too-Hard-For-Me Word Spree

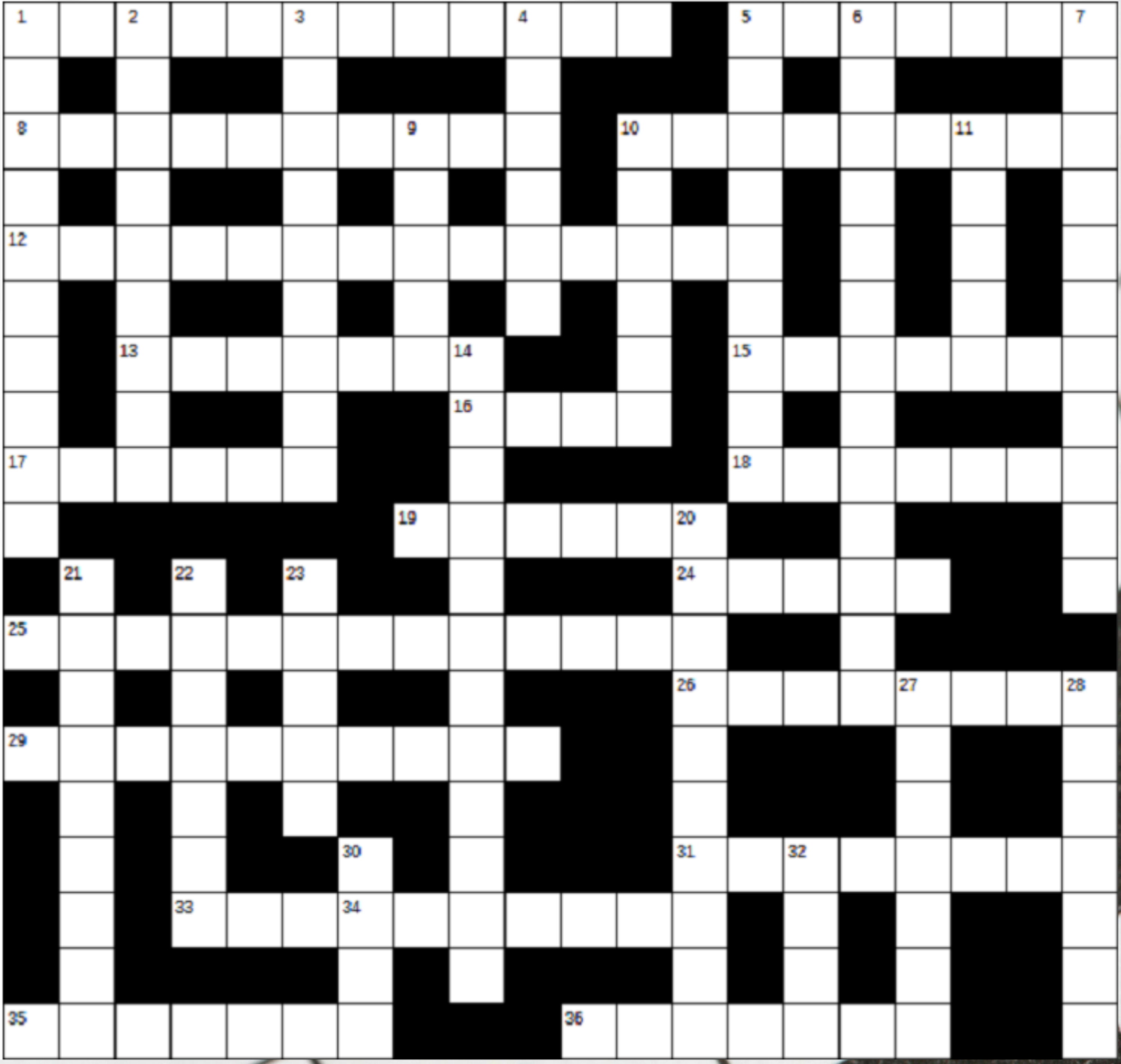
(aka The Crossword)

**Greencard's only gone and done another one. In't he great?
Curl up with a blanket and a cinnamon-infusion of some kind,
stick John Carpenter's Halloween soundtrack on the 8-track and engage that brain.**

And overleaf, the answers to the Issue 1 and 2 crosswords.

Across:
1. 2018 platformer that saw a Next re-release in 2023 (4, 8)
5. Leafy maze game from Spain (7)
8. Could be from Alternative Software, Hewson Consultants or Melbourne House (10)
10. Platform game released as Nebulus on the Spectrum (9)
12. Graphic adventure from the publishers of Kick Off (7, 2, 5)
13. Jones, I presume (7)
15. Before disks, we used tapes for this (7)
16. Could belong to either a dragon or a wizard (4)
17. An obscure Russian quiz game, and a hit for Blondie (4, 2)
18. Trick ______, Manic Miner mod (2, 5)
19. Sportswear brand who licenced a soccer sim (7)
24. After Blind, before Dizzy (5)
25. Nifty Snake clone from Bytemaniacos Concurso BASIC 2025 (4, 9)
26. Arch mass? (3, 5)
29. Endor, but with motorbikes (10)
31. Shaw brothers food-em-up inspired by Tapper (5, 3)
33. Obscure Spanish text adventure from 1990 (10)
35. Dark ______, game shares it's name with a naval thriller novel (7)
36. Setting for Platoon and Rambo (7)

Down:
1. 2024 action game, bottom-right key of a rubber-keyed Speccy (5, 5)
2. Unpopular Mastertronic shoot-em-up (5, 4)
3. Press T to change things up (9)
4. "250 K of pure mystery" (6)
5. El _______ De Rocco, Spanish action game (9)
6. Prolific Spanish developers (3, 5, 5)
7. ________ Circus, Taito arcade racer (11)
9. Golf game named after a Scottish golf course (5)
10. Mischievous cat, had a couple of outings on the Speccy (6)
11. Famous Italian race track not featured in Chequered Flag (5)
14. Advanced sail? (8, 4)
20. Rather good Mastertronic port of a popular arcade (10)
21. Celestial renegade (9)
22. Quite a varied publisher, everything from sports sims to strategy games featuring licenced toys (7)
23. Sequel to Commando (5)
27. _______ Bumper, French pinball game (7)
28. After Space, before Attack (7)
30. Most recent Spectrum (4)
32. _______ Attack, featured on the awful "Spectrum 50 Games" compilation (4)



Finally, some answers.

So, yeah, we forgot to publish the answers to the crossword last time, so here are the solutions to the Issue 1 and Issue 2 puzzles.

Hopefully this can you bring you some closure.

P	R	O	H	I	B	I	T	I	O	N		K	I	K	S	T	A	R	T
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H	E	A	R	T	L	I	G	H	T		R	O	A	D	R	A	C	E	R
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F	L	E	X	U	O	U	S	A	V	I	F	A	U	N	A		I		I
O		O			S			R			L			I			M		D
C		F			E			T			E	N	D	Z	O	N	E		E
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	T				D				O				S				R		O
D	E	V	W	I	L	L	T	W	O	Z	X		O				A		S
	S		O		O				M				F	L	O	O	D	I	T
	C	O	L	E	C	O			D				D				O		A
	A		F		K				A		P	R	O	F	E	S	S	O	R
	P		A						R				O		G				K
M	E	A	N	S	T	R	E	A	K				M	U	G	S	Y		

Room 310

DaRe

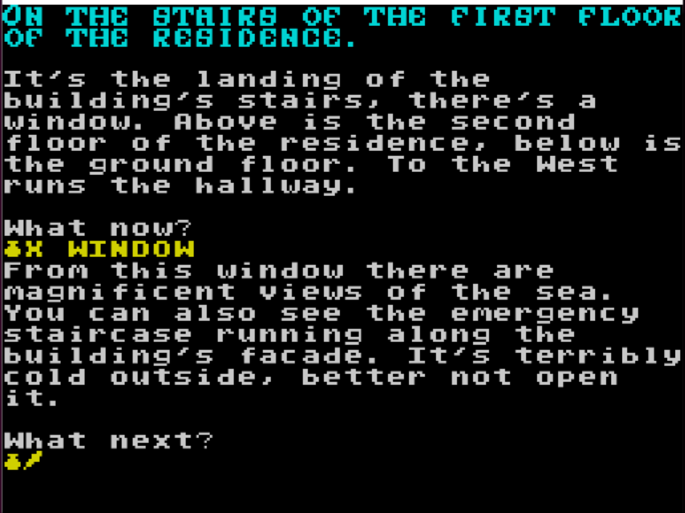
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44473

$2

So far there are two instalments of the ‘Room 310’ series, the first (The Awakening) was released in late 2024 and missed out on a review. We’re now up to part 2 (Face to Face) and it picks up where it left off, so you really need to play them in order. It would be like watching Police Academy 6 before… actually that’s a bad example.

Daniel has used several engines for his games over the years: MuCho for the ‘Antarctica’ series, DAAD for ‘Erinia’, and Inform for the (Ace-winning) ‘Echoes of The Future’. Room 310 series use PAWS, I’m pleased to say.

You play Sandra Garland, a troubled young student, living at the ‘New Dawn’ residence. The place is more or less deserted, everyone else having left to spend the holidays with their families. Pained by memories of your closest friend Ariatna, who disappeared without explanation, you find yourself sucked into a vortex of conspiracy, betrayal, and uncertainty.



```
ON THE STAIRS OF THE FIRST FLOOR
OF THE RESIDENCE.

It's the landing of the
building's stairs, there's a
window. Above is the second
floor of the residence, below is
the ground floor. To the West
runs the hallway.

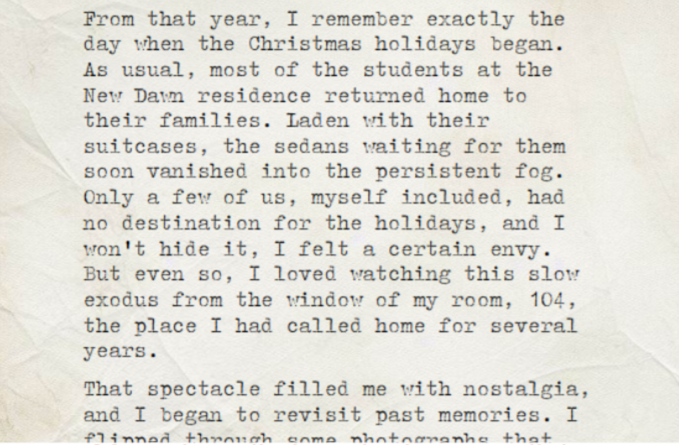
What now?
X WINDOW
From this window there are
magnificent views of the sea.
You can also see the emergency
staircase running along the
building's facade. It's terribly
cold outside, better not open
it.

What next?
```

I. Will. Not. Open. The. Window.

The game setting is quite unnerving, at least it is in my head. It makes me picture a town that has seen its best days and has more derelict buildings than the tourist information centre cares to mention. Like Barrow-in-Furness but American. Most of all I picture empty streets, so if you ever need help, it is not close at hand. And that’s bad news, because the deeper you delve, it looks like you’re getting mixed up in something big.

While story takes a key role in this series, it does feel closer to playing a regular problem-solving text adventure than his recent games. There are plenty of classical puzzles (nothing wrong with that)—keys & locked doors, dark rooms & flashlights, and the ‘distract vicious dog with raw meat’ trick. But there are original puzzles that give the game its personality, solved by hints scattered in pictures, books, cultural references, dreams and everywhere. So, you will need to read the cutscenes. Some of it may simply be describing a bird on a branch outside, but that text is peppered with vital clues.



From that year, I remember exactly the day when the Christmas holidays began. As usual, most of the students at the New Dawn residence returned home to their families. Laden with their suitcases, the sedans waiting for them soon vanished into the persistent fog. Only a few of us, myself included, had no destination for the holidays, and I won't hide it, I felt a certain envy. But even so, I loved watching this slow exodus from the window of my room, 104, the place I had called home for several years.

That spectacle filled me with nostalgia, and I began to revisit past memories. I flipped through some photographs that

Memoirs, all alone in the moonlight

As usual, it comes with high quality extras. The most important of which is the game solution told as a typed diary memoir. If you complete it with only a couple of peeks, I’d say you’ve done well. But if you’re the kind of person that typed “EAT LAMP” in your first text adventure, you’ll need to rely on it heavily.

Part 2 ends on a cliffhanger, so I’m eagerly awaiting part 3. I’m not sure where it’s headed—will it do a ‘Renegade 3’ and take us on a journey through Cartoon Time? Doubtful, but even if it does, I’ve seen enough to say that Daniel will probably make it work.

Not only am I the sort of person who’d type “eat lamp”, but I'd spell it wrong, type in some swear words then give up and play Manic Miner. Also, I watched Police Academy 4: Citizens on Patrol first. It didn't make a poke of sense. In spite of all this, reading Dave's review made me want to dive into both parts of Room 310 and tackle my adventurephobia.

How did I get on? Great, as it happens. The story is gripping and supplying a walkthrough as a diary of memories is a work of genius, making it accessible to all. Before long I was making progress and parsing away like a pro.

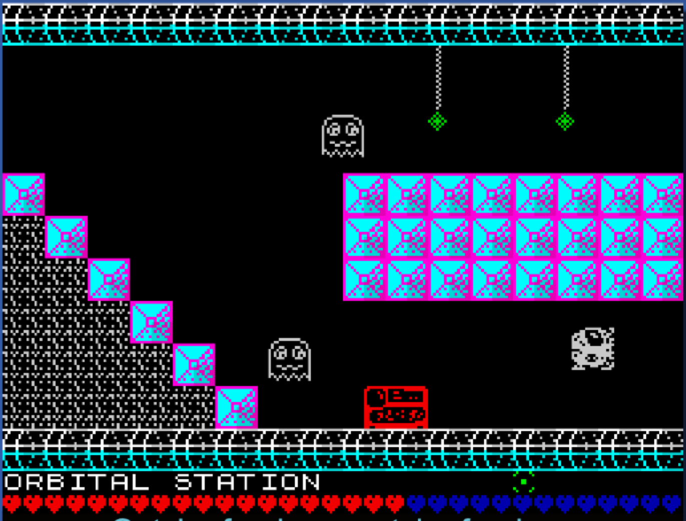
I have to admit I did use the stabilisers of “Sandra’s Memories” more often than using my noggin to navigate my way through, but it was still an enjoyable journey and I'm looking forward to the next installment. Give it a try - there's never been a better time for the adventure curious to stray out of their comfort zone and experience something new.

Return to Freakonia

Krappygamez

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44535

Free



Getcha freak on, getcha freak on

The premise of returning to a place you've never been is a perfect paradox, and it's the exact feeling that defines Freakonia. From the moment I arrived - or, more accurately, re-arrived - I was struck by a sense of déjà vu. So many of the sprites seemed weirdly familiar, a sensation the game itself winks at with a loading screen that proudly boasts of "even more reused assets." Developed by 'Krappygamez,' it's a title that proudly let's you know it's not taking itself too seriously.

This is a Zynaps-style shooter that feels teleported directly from the heyday of the ZX Spectrum. Its strange, clashing visuals are pure early-80s weirdness, each screen looking like the recovered sketchbook of a 13-year-old savant who mainlined caffeine and 80s kids TV - where the cartoons gave you nightmares. Do not come to Freakonia for polished graphics or silky-smooth gameplay, they are conspicuously absent. Instead, come for the unadulterated, wonderfully bizarre imagination on display. Here, the rough edges aren't flaws, they're essential features, adding to the surreal, dreamlike quality.

The list of conventional "issues" is long: eye-watering colour clash, a random bestiary of sprites, a complete absence of cohesive world-building, inescapable kill zones, and a profound silence where the music should be. By all rights, it should be a disaster. Yet, it's strangely compelling. The charm is in the sheer unpredictability. I never knew what was waiting in the next of the 192 rooms — a fact that made stumbling upon one of the three boss fights a genuine and exciting surprise.

The difficulty doesn't come from the enemies (which are sparse and often avoidable) but from the deadly scenery itself. Bumping a spike sends your ship careening in a violent, pinball-like panic, devouring your precious health hearts at an alarming rate.

The magic is in its making. Built with Boriel Basic and the Krasplib engine, the fact that this sprawling world is essentially compiled BASIC is astounding. The sheer scale and ambition are impressive enough, but the large, detailed boss sprites are particular technical triumphs.

In the end, Freakonia's draw is its boundless imagination and shocking scope. I kept playing not to conquer, but to discover - to see what glorious madness the next screen would hold. It's a triumphant example of what happens when a game engine prioritizes creative freedom above all else. No two journeys through its bizarre worlds are quite the same, and my first return visit to a place I'd never been was one I won't soon forget.

When people get dewy-eyed over ZX Spectrum games, it's not long before Ultimate titles get fawned over. But it's nearly always the same ones that get mentioned first - and it's never Underwurlde. Which is a shame, because I rather liked Underwurlde. I never really knew what I was doing, but I enjoyed it.

Return to Freakonia has that kind of vibe: I explore, I bounce off the baddies, I explore some more. Then I pick up a power-up or two, and suddenly areas that were previously inaccessible open up. On top of that, there are three bosses to defeat - which brings back memories of Atic Atac.

To claim that Return to Freakonia is Ultimate-level quality would be a stretch, but there's something about it that keeps you coming back. Yes, there's awful colour clash. Yes, some room entry points cause instant deaths. Yes, the graphics are just plain weird. And yes, there's only spot sound FX. But still it's compelling. I want to see more of it. I want to map it. I want to know what all the power-ups do.

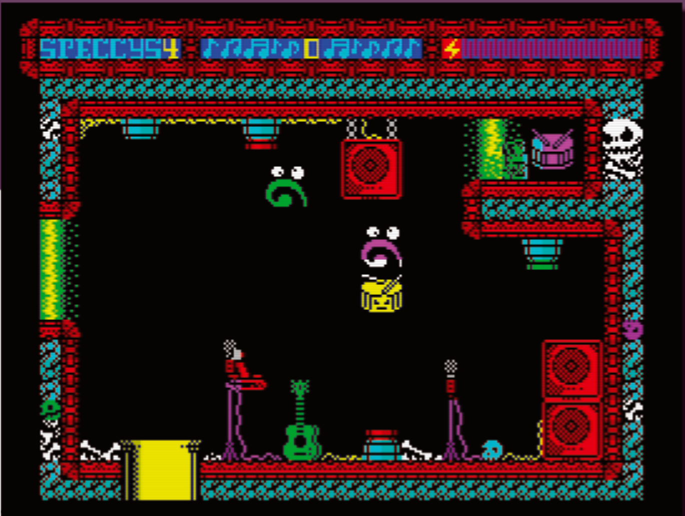
Had it been 1985 and I'd bought this as a Mastertronic release, I'd have felt I'd got my money's worth. For context: that £1.99 price tag, inflation-adjusted, would be £6.25 today. So at free, this is an absolute bargain. Spend that saved cash on an '80s compilation cassette, stick it on while you play, and stop complaining about the lack of AY music.

The Rubber Keyed Wonder (The Vinyl Chapter)

Microchops

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44177

£30 (See below)



Testing, testing.

A new superhero, the squarish Speccy, is here to save music - not from pop stars with font-like names (looking at you, Ariana Grande and Dua Lipa), but from a crisis of stolen instruments that have been stashed away in a 48K Universe. Without them, Gracious Films' epic documentary, The Rubber Keyed Wonder, risks an AI-generated score to accompany it, or much worse, SID chip synths… NOOOOooooo! Speccy won't let that happen, but he needs your guidance in The Vinyl Chapter.

We have here a rather delightful and highly polished indeedy. It opens with a great beeper ditty (who needs a sound chip anyway), which although it is fairly short, I quite like it nonetheless. The AY title and in game musical scores are pretty decent too. A small technical aside before I move on: on my OMNI 128HD (an early revision that I imported from China around 2020), I needed to use OUT 32765,48 before loading, otherwise the game would crash on the first screen. This disables the AY though too. Newer OMNIs may not have this issue.

From the menu, we see our hero Speccy in his wonderful pixel form; simple options are presented, but there is no way to redefine the keys, so Q, A, O, P and M it is. It took a little while for me to learn the physics of the gameworld, as whilst our protagonist may zip around the screen well, he cannot hover; gravity takes hold as soon as the Q key is no longer being pressed.

There are some busy screens to navigate, but all beautifully pixelated and well animated.

Speccy is armed with a super powerful laser beam attribute, but this will only dissipate certain roaming nasties who warp into each area. Others, that usually move in a set pattern, are immune to this charge. Note that our hero is only as fast as other characters within the game, you cannot outrun anyone.

Exploring this flip-screen world, you will see the musical instruments that have been locked away behind mighty forcefields. It's as simple as hitting some switches to unlock and collect them, except that isn't so simple, as it requires fairly well timed movements. Your work depressing all of the switches at once can be undone by pesky roamers, so it can take a few attempts.

There are four lives, which seems fairly miserly, except once all of those are spent, you may continue your quest. Whilst this sets you back to the beginning of the gameworld, the instruments that you have already collected don't need to be again. The barriers you have unlocked are locked though, which is only a minor inconvenience. This means that the game doesn't get too easy too quickly from continuing.

Overall, I really like this game, and whilst Q, A, O, P and M are never my first choice of keys, I've now played enough Speccy games for this not to confuse my brain anymore, but your mileage will vary here. It's well presented, well pixelated and ultimately fun to play, casually linking into the aforementioned Gracious Films epic "The Rubber Keyed Wonder" quite nicely. Also, it's for Charity, mate! If you like it, and have some spare dosh, go donate to https://www.justgiving.com/charity/southendcysticfibrosisassociation.

The Rubber Keyed Wonder is a superb doc about the creation, launch and lifetime of our favourite machine, from the team that brought us the fabulous Bedrooms to Billions. It features some familiar talking heads and is a must watch for all self respecting Spec-Chums.

This official game-of-the-film is available as part of the movie's soundtrack, Shakin' Stevens style, and can be purchased directly from Gracious Films:

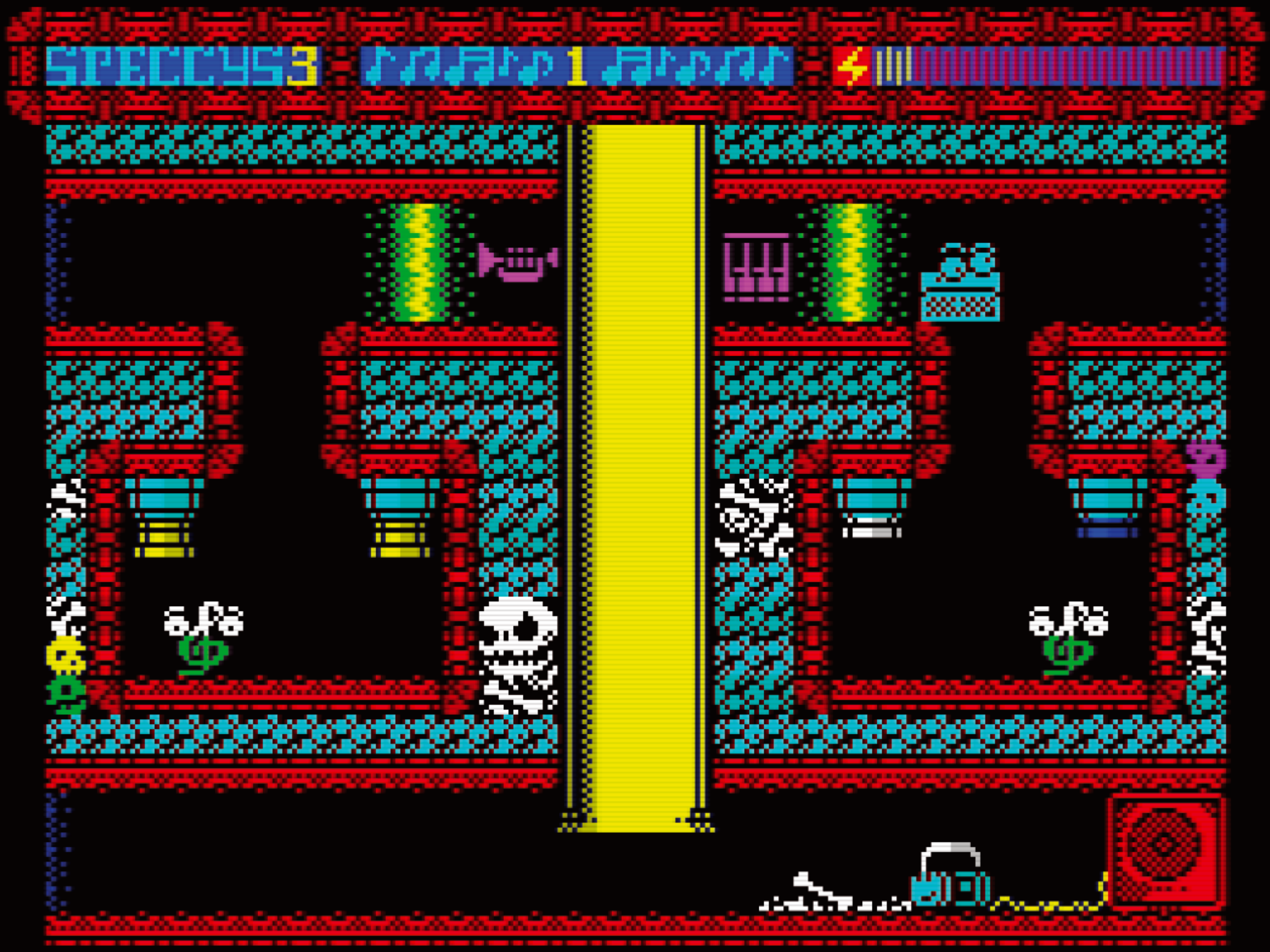
https://www.graciousfilms.com/pages/vinyl-the-rubber-keyed-wonder-soundtrack

Ah, the official game of the film. Not something you see so much of these days on the ZX Spectrum but the Rubber Keyed Wonder is a very special film and something that everyone with a remote interest in our hobby should go see.

This one plays very similarly to Chops' excellent Hair Trigger. Once more there are various plungers which need to be pressed in order to open previously inaccessible areas & plenty of enemies to avoid. It's a tricky beast this, and it takes quite a bit to even recover the first of the 10 musical instruments. Thankfully there's a continue option, which although it does throw you back to the start of the game, it "banks" the instruments you have already collected.

I am a huge fan of the graphical style, the anthropomorphic musical instruments with cute cartoon eyes & the Speccy itself are absolutely beautiful. There is just SO much colour being liberally splashed about the screen, as a ZX Spectrum fan it really does my heart good to see it. There's an impressive beeper tune on the menu & some toe tapping AY music pounding through the game too.

This one is well worth picking up & it's for a good cause too. I'm sure Sir Clive would be proud.



Is this rude? I think this might be rude.

Mpk was firmly against charity organisations for years, until he found out that, for instance, the Cystic Fibrosis Association was actually working *against* cystic fibrosis. Boy, was his face red.

Anyway, cystic fibrosis suuucks. So much, in fact, that Lee 'Chops' Stevenson has made all his games free on itch.io, and encourages players to drop a donation to an extremely worthy cause in the form of the Southend Cystic Fibrosis Association, which helps support families living with cystic fibrosis to improve the quality of their lives.

https://www.justgiving.com/charity/southendcysticfibrosisassociation

Some of you have suggested that you'd like to pay for BreakSpace, but you can't : you can do this instead, or slip a few quid to a similar org in your region. Tell 'em Chops sent you.

Crabby Returns

Hikoki

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44437

Free

Huzzah! Another BASIC game that can be stopped, listed and changed. And it's a one-button game.

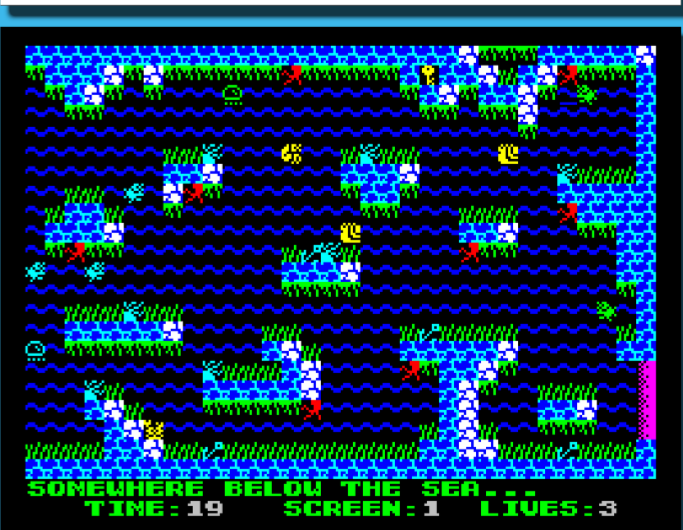
You control Crabby, a decapod crustacean obsessed with collecting keys, but who is only happy doing so if he's travelling in a straight line, and only likes turning in 90° at a time; it's a simple life.

Crabby Returns is a basic collect-em-up affair, with our hero being chased by an evil protagonist. If caught, it's game over. Press any single key to begin, and then any single key to turn (note: Symbol Shift and Caps Shift need not apply).

You start moving left to right (usually - I do get a different result occasionally), and continue until you hit a reef, in which case you will turn a multiple of 90°, or remain static if the edge of the screen is reached.

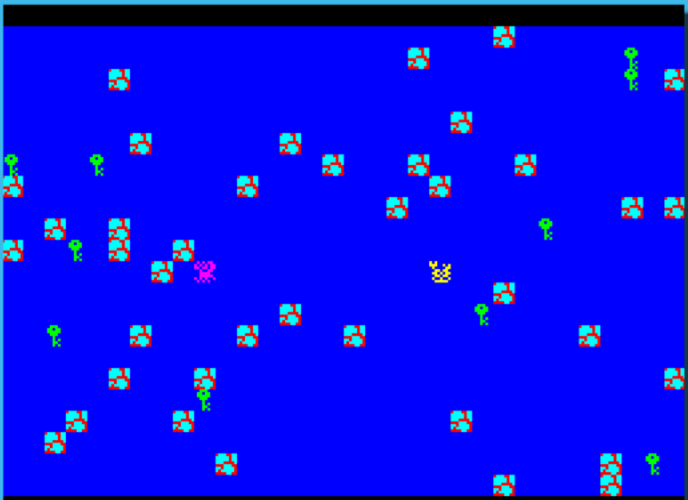
Rotations are in clockwise order : if travelling left to right - unless impeded by said stoppers - will be down, and then left, and then up, and then right again in this order - or typically in this order. Sometimes it doesn't always follow this set pattern, but mostly seems to. Once you've retrieved the keys, you win.

Overall, this is a simple game that I can imagine my younger self typing in from the magazines on my mate's rubber keyed Speccy and us marvelling at the results, then trying to "port" it to the Beeb at School, or my Commode 64 at home. Load, break and enjoy.



```
SOMEWHERE BELOW THE SEA...
   TIME:19    SCREEN:1    LIVES:3
```

The original C is for Crabby



Things don't seem better, down where it's wetter

'*One button should be enough for anyone*', to quote the young Bill Gates. How we scoffed in later years, with our 9-button fighting sticks and joypads with more levers and knobs than a dominatrix's dungeon. But maybe he was right, you know?

Crabby Returns, it's worth mentioning, is an homage to 2013 title C is for Crabby, a unique and fun float-em-up. The original uses 5 buttons to guide Crabby about collecting snails in a much more traditional manner, while here Crabby can only turn to their right.

Sounds frustrating, possibly, but while there is frustration to be had here, that's not it. At this stage of Video Games generally, and even on the Spectrum specifically, there are so many titles available that any unique or unusual control method is a welcome novelty.

Only being able to turn one way means that you have to plan a couple of moves ahead. Want to grab that key to your left? Then you'll need to go through an elaborate loop, which allows the hunting octopus to close in. And maybe there are reef sections in the way - sometimes you can use those to bounce back 180 degress, which would put that key on your right, but possibly send you hurtling straight into the enemy's jaws. It's a stressful life being a crab.

The levels are randomly generated, but I do appreciate that if you die, you get to replay the same level again. It doesn't refresh until you complete it (or reset the computer).

But what about the frustration I mentioned? Well, perhaps predictably, this arises from the BASIC platform itself, with the key input nowhere near responsive enough to allow for the quick and accurate maneuvers you need.

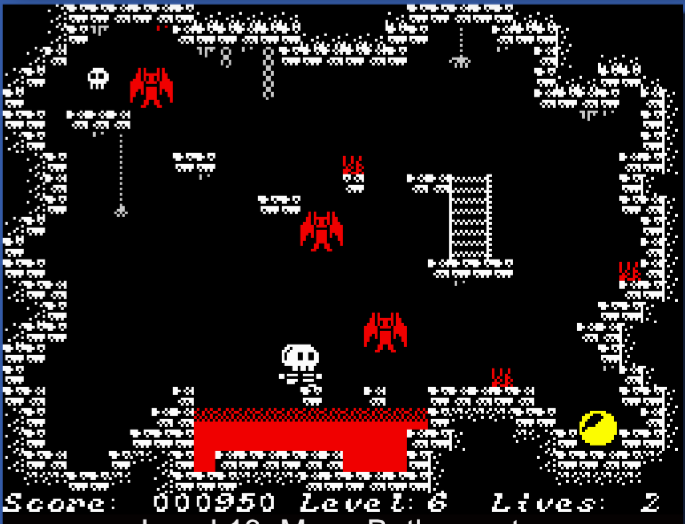
That's a bit of a shame, but it's still a good time if you're willing to adapt to some sluggishness.

Boni in Bat Hell

Steve Tyson

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44441

Free



Level 13. Many Bothans etc.

Boni in Hell is a platform game which...
Boni in Hell is a plat...
Boni in hell is a platform game which is very…
[Game over].
[Restart]
Boni in Hell is a platform...
Boni in Hell is a platform game which is very hard indeed, and...
Boni in Hell is a plat...
[Game over]
[Restart]
Boni in Hell is a [savestate] platform game that [savestate] is very hard indeed, [savestate] and is not for mere mortals.

(Shaun, please take over here. Andy's broken. -Ed)

After years and years of playing left/right/jump style games on many 8-bit computer systems, you'd have thought I'd be good at it by now, wouldn't you? Well, Boni in Bat Hell! Comes along and puts me in my place. I feel like I'm 9 again, struggling through Manic Miner or something. To be clear from the outset: this game is blummin' difficult!

The story tells of our friend Boni who is trapped in Bat Hell, so bats must symbolise the developer's (Steve Tyson) idea of the underworld. My version of such a chilling place would be somewhere in which you are forced to play lazy Amstrad CPC ports of good Speccy games ad infinitum! (Let's face it, that's basically nearly every CPC game) *Shudder*.

Anyway, there are 20 whole levels to play through in order to get Boni's freedom again (though, at the moment, getting to see more than 10% of this game is a stumbling block right now, but somehow I'm compelled to retry over and over).

What we have here is another static screen platform game, the aim of which is to collect the skull present on screen. Getting to it is the fun part, with some very precisely timed and pixel perfect movements required, which takes some practise for sure. Thankfully, or should I say, mercifully, there is no time limit per level, otherwise, this game would be more difficult than a typical Raffaele Cecco release (I judge it to be about as difficult). Each level tempts you by a magic orb that will give you an additional life which will disappear after a short time, but this can also make your progress more arduous as they can be difficult to reach. Only one appears for each screen.

Rather aptly, it contains a bright rendition of the "Impossible Mission" television show from the 1960s and 1970s. The graphics are cute and well defined and move beautifully, and aside from the basic Manic Miner-style gameplay, there are also ladders to climb on some levels. The hazards to avoid include fire pits, spikes, bats and red demons. In typical fashion, the roamers move in set and almost hypnotic patterns. And whilst somewhat frustrating, there's also a lot of fun to be had here. Everyone likes a challenge, right?

Boni in Bat Hell is a tough platformer with an intriguing aesthetic and brilliant music. The main theme is the Mission Impossible tune (AY needed), and it's exceptionally well done. There are also catchy tunes for when the game starts and when you die. If I'm being picky, the music doesn't quite match the "skeleton in hell" vibe, though Mission Impossible does feel fitting for the game's brutal difficulty.

Boni in Bat Hell is a very challenging platformer. You start with hardly any lives, and each level is packed with tricky jumps designed to catch you off guard. The game does throw you a bone (pun intended) with flashing, time-limited orbs that grant an extra life - if you can reach them fast enough. Of course, they're almost always placed in death-trap locations, turning this mechanic into a fun little sub-game within each level.

In terms of level design, some stages could flow better. I prefer games where you can skip long waits by taking risks, but Boni often forces you to pause and wait for enemies to move before progressing, which got a bit frustrating. That said, overall, I really enjoyed it. Make no bones about it: Boni in Bat Hell is worth a look.

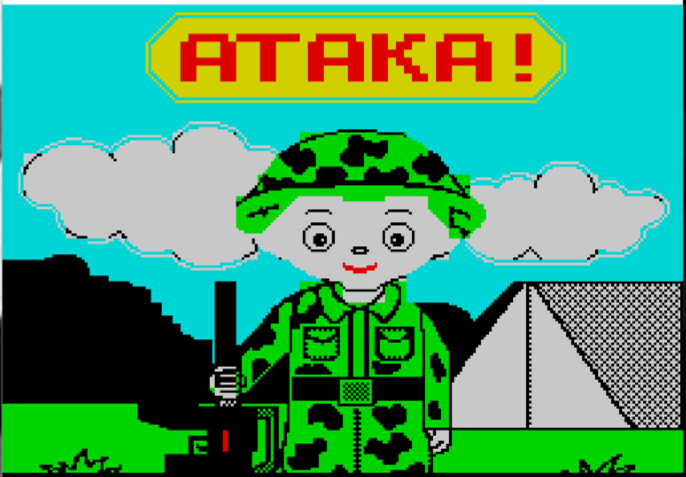
Attack!

Boris Vasilievich Makurin

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44485

Free

I was going to say that now feels an especially bad time for a war game, but given that we've had less than a month's peace in the last century, there probably never has been a 'good' one. Anyway, 'Attack!' is suitably cartoonish, and has more in common with chess than mechanised slaughter. Also I suppose we should welcome games from a rare genre, with a mere 1.34% of games in ZXDB being war strategy*.

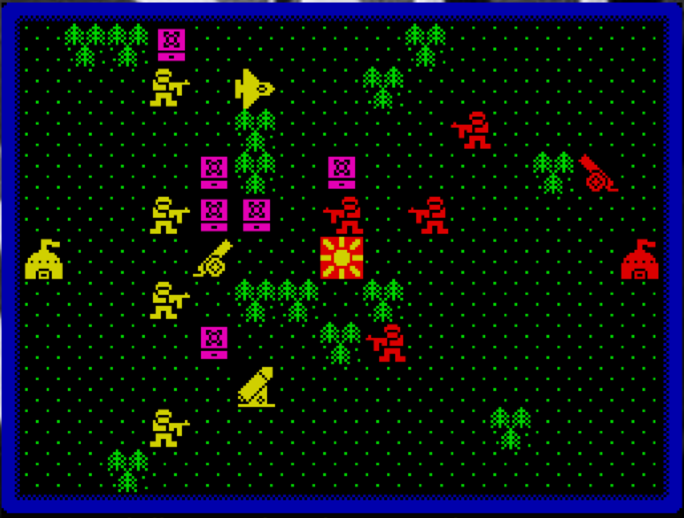


Looks younger than 19

The game opens with a beeper routine of 'Bad Boys' ripped from 'Wham! The Music Box'** (why not 'Freedom' or 'Young Guns'?). Apart from that, everything is programmed in BASIC, and after some initial speed and control issues were improved on, it mostly does a good job of it.

This is a turn-based game with two equally equipped opposing armies, a randomly generated forest, and options for weapon boosts and mines. One side wins when the other side is annihilated or their base captured. The 'pieces' have different capabilities, mostly their range: soldiers & cannons can move 2 spaces, and planes, tanks & missiles move up to four. The cannons and missiles are the most powerful, with a firing capability of up to 3 spaces; but it's surprisingly egalitarian—a plane can no more fly over a tree than a tank can roll over one.

An enemy is destroyed either by walking or firing into it, followed by a (slightly too long) series of beeps that sounds more like you've lost a life in a type-in than vanquished a foe in battle. Whether you choose the 2-player option or against the computer, there is a game to be had here. It's one thing counting squares and checking if you'll be in range, but you have to consider which power ups (if any) the enemy has. The easiest way to win, certainly against the computer, is to concentrate on getting one piece to the base via the outskirts and ignoring the moshpit. I suppose that's no different to focusing on Queening a pawn, but here it feels like cheesing. If you choose to engage, then the computer opponent is surprisingly good.



Jolly sporting that we take turns

At the time of release there were complaints of slowness, but I think it's fine. The computer takes less than 2 minutes to complete a move, which is about as fast as I can do it, and certainly faster than a 2-player game with concomitant snacks, drinks and banter. The only issues for me were non-debounced keys losing a move, and the screen draw being slowed down— unnecessarily—by protracted BEEPs between tiles.

Attack! is a decent strategy game with impressive BASIC AI, and not once did it crash on me, so we can safely say that it's definitely not Stonkers.

See now, I'm no lily-livered peacenik like Dave up there, so I welcome a good old-fashioned war game. The opportunity to get your innards distributed about a forest by enemy ordinance is every youngster's right, always has been. No matter which side you're on. No hard feelings, kids.

And this is *quite* an old-fashioned strategy game. 2 identical 'armies' line up at either side of the screen and take turns manoeuvring around the woods and shooting at each other. It very much feels like a boardgame or maybe a minimalist Laser Squad. The strengths and weaknesses of the combined arms are clearly understandable, and the computer opponent is pretty competent.

It's simple, but not easy, and gives you a little room to experiment with different tactics in the restricted space. So ready up, focus, smoke 'em if you got 'em. Attack is one to try.

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*283 in 21067 games

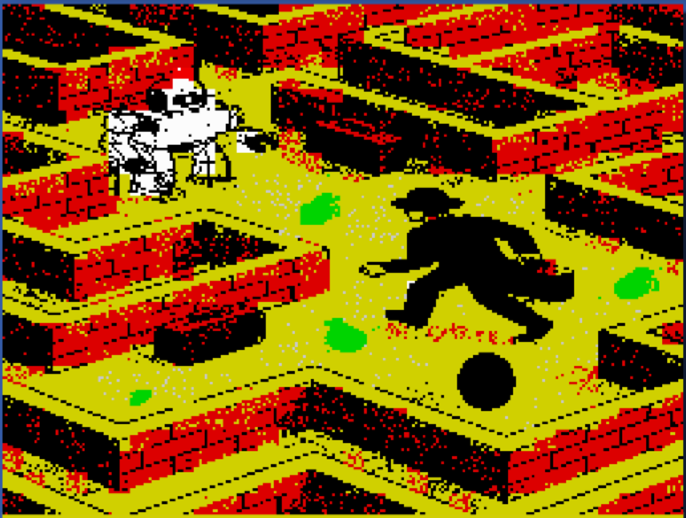
**kudos to our 1980's disco specialist Sloany for spotting that

Maze

Gorkel

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44533

Free



Mind the pineapples, Vicar!

This is author Gorkel's second published game, and like his first, it's an entry for the Bytemaniacos BASIC competition. The screenshot says it all really—'Maze' is proper oldschool with UDGs and everything.

Your mission on each level is to collect the plans for a military installation that are kept in four suitcases. That makes sense, when I cut up my old credit cards I spread the fragments between several bins to deter the would-be criminal jigsaw enthusiast. However, I do keep all my eggs in one basket. The suitcases are left lying around on the floor, which doesn't sound like rigorous security to me, but there is a guard robot, randomly scattered grenades, and a jerkily patrolling green orb.

Most of the gameplay comes from avoiding the robot: it's forever trying to home in on you, so you have to lure it away from suitcases, and use scenery to block it. However, the starting position of the robot is random, as are the grenades, so depending how the dice land you can get anything from an easy to a literally impossible level. But in this kind of game, not knowing what you're going to get is part of the fun.

There is a time limit of 250 seconds, which takes nearly 8 minutes in real time. And that demonstrates the game's biggest problem—it plays about as slow as BASIC can get. While this language isn't known for its speed, the listing does look like it would benefit from a bit of tidying up for efficiency. Anyway, no matter these days, for it's the 21st Century and we can boost the CPU in emulators. 14MHz seems about right for the average player, 28 for the thrill seeker, and 50 for the pervert.

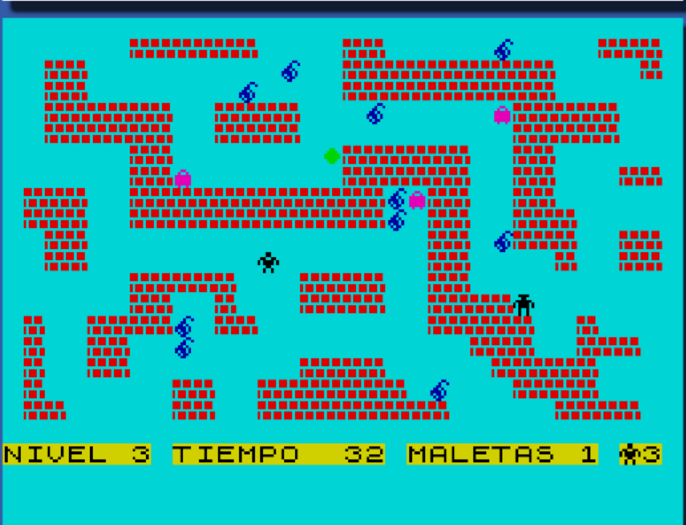
'Maze' is clearly the author revisiting his youth, with graphics, design, and code help from the wife & kids. It harks back to a time when we realised our wildest dreams in squares of 64 pixels. Keep that backstory in mind and it's more fun to play. Remember—it didn't cost £9.95, and nobody promised you a digital watch.

It's nice to have a back story included with your game, isn't it? This could be about anything. Why is this guy picking up suitcases? Lost property officer in Victoria Station? Business man looking for his mislaid lunch in the park? The loading screen gives the robot bit away, I suppose, but I'd never have gotten to the spy / military plans story by myself.

For his second game, Gorkel's taken a more ambitious step from his previous text adventure, with lots going on here. The random map generation by itself is a big chunk of work, and if you're looking to get started with BASIC, this isn't the worst place to start - source is included.

Speeding up the game is not really an option, as Dave suggests, it's a necessity. It's then you notice that the robot is deceptively sneaky, only chasing you when you're close, and even then sometimes seeming to linger near a suitcase where you can't kite it into getting stuck on a corner.

So yeah, it seems rudimentary, with blocky movement and not a huge amount of depth. But it's a finished game, which is the #1 priority for the hobbyist. Best not to be too ambitious. It's called 'Maze', for crying out loud, which sets the expectations nice and solid. Down to Earth, like.
See you next year, Gorkel. Sky's the limit.



A-maze-ing pace

Cindy Block

Grongy/Art-top/n1k-o

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44486

Free

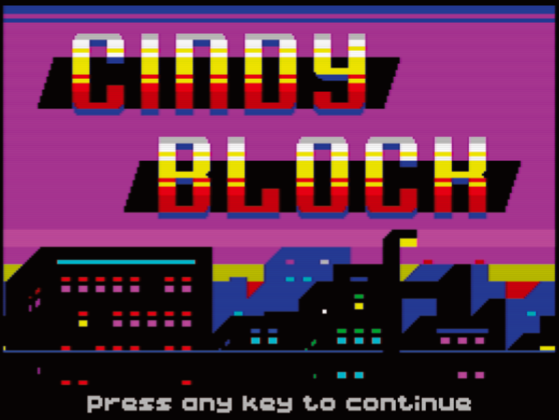
I bet you're all wondering: what if Tetris was a shoot-em up, rather than a shape stacking puzzle game? Well, no. Neither was I. But the Russian team behind Cindy Block imagined just that, and came up with this rather fun shoot-em up/puzzle game cross over.

And what does this look like? Let me adumbrate further. The play area is a well, arranged 8x8 blocks slowly proceed downwards from the void above, which are grouped by colour, and at the bottom of there is a moveable craft which will expel an individual block upwards with the fire button. If your shot happens to connect with one of the downward moving arrangements, it will add to it, each time pushing it back a few pixels. Once you have a rectangular shape of two rows or more in a singular colour, then it is removed, but more follow like a never ending conveyor belt.

Complete a white rectangle, and the whole conveyor belt is cleared, potentially giving you some much needed respite, especially on later levels. And there are other power ups too, which dissipate a whole group with just one well-aimed shot, or will hinder your progress, but this is only a temporary upgrade for obvious reasons. As soon as any one of the falling blocks hit the yellow and black stripe at the bottom of the screen, it's game over.

Now I've got the explainy bit out of the way, I've got to say that I really love this game. It starts off at a sedate enough pace, and the learning curve is small, and it's quite gentle in its difficulty, on the easiest setting at least, where I recommend you start (though I guess real gamers will change this to 'high' first go). This is where I got hooked. All of a sudden, I was on level 7 and almost hypnotised by this simple concept. Must remove more blocks. Must continue. Then I look and I'm past level 10. Where is the time going? It's certainly something I could lose hours to with that "just another quick game" vibe about it.

Cindy Block is well presented, with a definite demo-coder ambiance about it, and apt AY music which helps to hook you in during proceedings. It also manages 50 frames per second, fact fans, which isn't too common on the old Speccy. But overall, this blends perfectly my two favourite gaming genres: puzzle games and shoot-em ups. It's definitely ACE!



We're not sure if the skyline is relevant, but it looks great in motion

Hmm. Hold on a second. I am less definite about the ACEness of Cindy Block.

My very first impressions were very definite, in fact, although in the other direction. I switched to the medium setting for my first game and quickly found myself… bored. The basic gameplay is simple, and as your movement and rate of fire are so snappy, there seemed to be very little challenge. I slogged through to level 13 before accidentally closing the emulator when trying to capture a screenshot. I was not looking forward to playing it again.

But I did, of course, and bumped it up to the High level. That's more like it.

Starting at level 11, it's pretty busy from the get go, demanding attention. While on the lower levels I was leaning pretty heavily on the 'up' button, which moves the blocks down, I mostly stay away from it at higher speeds.

Your shots, as well as filling up the required oblongs, push all the blocks back up a little. This can mean that it's sometimes in your advantage to make a mistake - sending an extra block or two to push everything back, filling a 4x3 instead of a 4x2. As you shoot faster than the tiles move, this feels like cheating, but it's always a gamble. Screw up doing this later on and it's curtains.

Precision is key, then, although there are a few hiccups. Push the blocks far enough back and they dissappear off the top of the screen - they come back, but sometimes shots you've fired don't count if they land off-screen.

Irritatingly, given my initial feeling that the game was far too easy, there's a very rapid jump in diffficulty after level 13 that feels a touch unfair. I don't know what to think.

On one hand, this is a fresh and novel design, which is normally exactly what I'm looking for.

But on the other hand, the difficulty balance is a little off which makes me feel bad in two directions. But on the other hand, it's technically brilliant, with great visuals and an excellent soundtrack. Then again, on the other hand, the shots missing because the blocks are offscreen is irritating and takes me out of the rhythm.

I'm running put of hands, frankly.

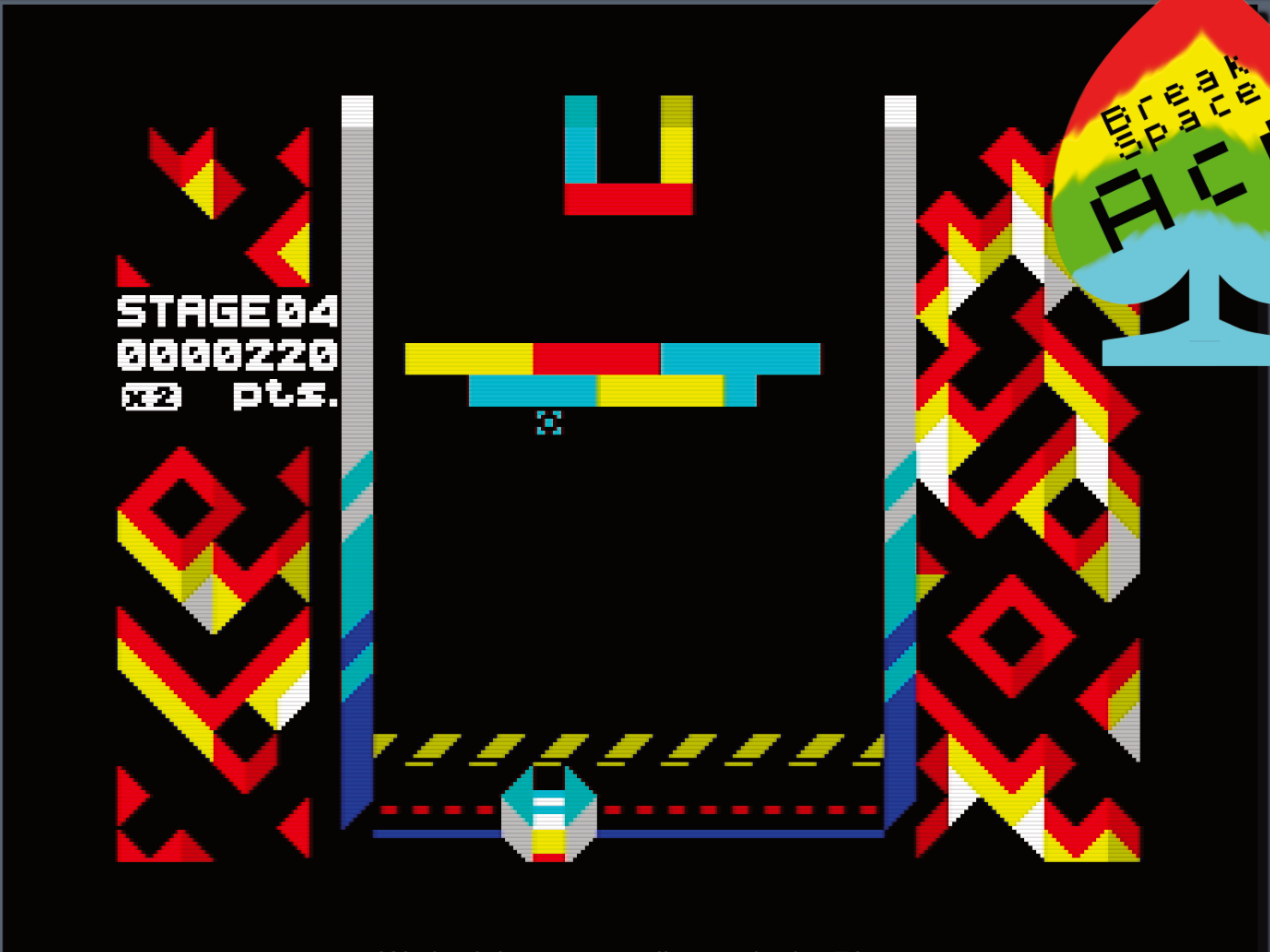
It's an technically perfect implementation of a not-quite-perfect yet original design. I feel like I should like it more than I do, but it doesn't quite grab me. If this isn't an Ace, it's a close run thing, especially given Shaun's enthusiasm. Someone get in here and make a decision.

It gives me no pleasure at all—by which I mean it gives me immense pleasure—to point out to my learned colleagues that this "fresh and novel design" is a faithful port of Quarth, a 1989 Konami videogame, unfortunately also known as Block Hole.

The choice of difficulty levels is welcome and clear: easy for training, medium for warm up (especially with rubber keys), and hard for a proper game. And by golly on hard, it's a wide-eyed adrenaline rush, with high bpm music fuelling the fire. I feel like I've been to Costa.

With Grongy on board, it was always going to look amazing. We see here his angular clean graphics, rather than the photorealistic style of which he's also capable. The screens are deceptive: they may look simple, but there's some clever melding of pixels and attributes to give the impression of having more colours per square than is normally possible. I thought they were multicolour at first. When the game's running there's even more unseen trickery going on to make things fit and run fast & smooth.

So, Ace or not Ace? Can I tip the scales? Easily, my answer rhymes with mace, and space, and coup de grâce. Actually not that last one. It's ace. I'm saying that Cindy Block is Ace. *(Fair enough - Ed)*



We had the same wallpaper in the 70s

Block Hole / Quarth - Konami, 1989
Released as Quarth in Japan to moderate success, and hilariously renamed as Block Hole for other territories where it did alright, apparently. There were some home versions on Gameboy and MSX, and mobile phone versions in the early 2000's. Honestly, I think this Speccy version looks better than the arcade.

From BEEP to Beauty

Why I Still Make Music on a Machine with a Horrible Little Speaker

by Andy ‘Uglifruit’ Jenkinson

Andy recently displayed his ZX Spectrum installation exhibit in The LCB Gallery, Leicester and performed with ZX Spectrums in Bristol as part of the run up to Machina Bristronica electronic music festival, where he also had a Teletext Art installation. Here, he talks about his relationship with the Spectrum’s brave little beeper.

I can admit it now. It’s taken me four decades, but I can say it: “The C64 was better,” but only if I then hurriedly add “if solely taken on the merits of its sound”. Commodore’s machine had the famous SID chip - an actual-factual synth that, in the right hands, could do very impressive things. The ZX Spectrum had ... a beeper. The C64 had an incredibly versatile multi waveform, three-voice polyphonic sound chip with ring modulation, ADSR and multimode audio filter. If you don’t understand that sentence, just trust me – it’s *very* impressive. Conversely the 48K Speccy had the ability to put the in-built speaker in one of two positions: forwards or backwards, that was all. And the sound we heard was generated only when switching the position at high frequency. This ‘1-bit’ audio approach was hardly cutting edge, and can be traced back to 1949 (on the BINAC computer), and the wider world hearing the CSIRAC computer beeping musically in 1951.

If you’ve programmed in BASIC on a Spectrum, you’ll know that the BEEP command makes a pitched note of a given duration, but here’s the stinger – under the hood all other operations cease while that happens. The reason for this is that there’s no internal clock to choose how fast to cycle the forwards and backwards of that speaker – if you want a 440hz note ‘A’, you need to make sure your machine code instructions take exactly the right time to execute before they move the speaker to its forward or backward position. Then repeat. Every 2.273 milliseconds, to keep the note steady. The ROM routine can’t do anything whilst it carefully runs through enough instructions to make the noise until it’s finished. You can’t print anything. You can’t read the keyboard. You can’t buffer a command. Nothing. That’s why BEEP 10,45 was such an annoying command in Dixon’s. 10 seconds of a piercingly high note which no-one can stop without pulling the plug.

ZX SPECTRUM 1-BIT MUSIC
Andy Jenkinson (2025)
1: Maze Phase
2: Trimphone Reel
3: The 78th Dance
4: Song For Penelope
5: Bleepington
6: Welcome to the Carnival
7: Casualty Strikes
8: Love Tokens
9: Let It Be (Lennon/McCartney)
A: Agent Urgent
B: Quadramain
C: About
Joystick UP/DOWN to choose music, FIRE to play
SAMSUNG
ZX Spectrum

Andy’s original 1983 Spectrum running his installation software

Despite the technical limitations - and much like not having hardware sprites or hardware scrolling - programmers of Sinclair’s machine were forced to use very clever techniques to fake something much more impressive with its audio. By calculating how long each machine code instruction was taking (measured in numbers of T-states - or 1/3500ths of a second) a canny Z80 programmer could do other things whilst killing time waiting for the precise moment they flipped the speaker to its other position. Whilst sound effects don’t require this critical timing, music does, and any attempt to do other things whilst music played, was often limited to checking to see if a key was being pressed on a menu screen.

At this point it’s pertinent to mention Manic Miner. Matthew Smith did two things of particular note in the ZX Spectrum audio world. Firstly, he had music playing while the actual game played. This was achieved by interleaving the action with repeated calls to a music routine which flipped the status of the speaker if needed (and updated song pointer to next note/frequency as required). He also did something really clever on the title screen. That screechy rendition of Strauss’s The Blue Danube uses a different trick. It tries its best to play a second set of notes at the same time as the first, so at the end of phrases it toggles the speaker at two different frequencies simultaneously. And thus polyphonic 1-bit magic begins in earnest on the ZX Spectrum.

I'd learnt classical guitar at quite an early age, and had a ZX81 – so was delighted to upgrade to a ZX Spectrum having both colour and sound – although those sounds were, in honesty, not its best feature. But soon there emerged games with *actual music* that were clearly pushing the boundaries of what the ZX Spectrum could do. My purchase of *Wham! The Music Box* in 1985 surprised my parents. I wasn't a Wham! fan, but this miraculous piece of software took the idea of two multiple lines playing simultaneously, and allowed the user to write their own music. And it sounded notably (pun intended) more musical than Manic Miner's efforts. You could have also use 'percussion' instead of notes at any step if you wanted. I was hooked.

1985 also saw the 128K Spectrum released (at least in Spain) and finally the Spectrum had a proper modern sound chip! ...Or did it? It was an off the shelf three channel AY-3-8910 chip dating back to 1978. It was *alright*, but it wasn't as individual and evolving as the ZX Spectrum beeper music seemed to be. 1986 brought us Konami's Ping Pong where Joffa Smith's 1-bit audio routine was used on the title screen with a sawing pwm style monophonic lead style, as well as percussion. And Tim Follin wowed everyone with his mind-blowing technical skills and musicality on his music routines for the release Agent X, (plus his music on Chronos and Agent X 2 the year after). Despite being on the older 48K models these sounded *nothing* like the things that'd gone before, and were far more characterful than the 128K sounds. Those felt like the sounds I'd been hearing in arcades for the past years, so somehow seemed less impressive, and they also didn't sound as good as the Commodore machine. [It should also be noted I didn't own a 128K Speccy, so I was probably somewhat biased with my love of the 48K model].

Andy presenting at the LCB gallery

Obviously as the commercial era of the Speccy ended, the programming talent didn't and notable contributions by talented hobbyist coders such as Shiru, utz and many others brought more 'engines' that further expanded what the ZX Spectrum beeper was capable of, and allowed others to compose music playable on a ZX Spectrum beeper. In 2010 Chris Cowley wrote the Windows application Beepola, which allowed non-programmers an easy way of composing using some of these audio engines – inserting their own musical compositions to be played back with clever tricks of pseudopolyphony and timbre that the aforementioned programmers had discovered... and thus a secondary 'scene' emerged with amazing beeper music being made thanks to these more accessible tools. Whilst the ZX Spectrum 'demoscene' generally used the AY chip alongside clever visuals, the beeper lot, with all their Spectrum's processor energy being taken up just making the sound, quietly (or noisily) made brilliant (if rather fizzy sounding) music.

Having been on the sidelines, doing some competent, but not exceptional, Z80 programming as a hobby all my life - and writing and teaching music - the ZX Spectrum very much still appealed to me. As an artist I like to explore pushing things up against their intended purpose, and I've been pleased to have written some ZX Spectrum music that's been used as the backbone for a musical about videogames, and recently had an interactive piece in an art gallery exhibition of exhibits curated around sound art using repurposed things. My Spectrum sat in the gallery for a month with visitors choosing which pieces of my music they wanted to listen to on it. Some people no doubt wondered why it was making an objectively horrible sound, but others told me they'd been transported to a place of their youth and genuinely enjoyed it.

I've also - in my own limited way - been pushing the ZX Spectrum as a device for musical performance. This is definitely not what the computer was designed to excel at! By writing some of my own routines (and very much building upon the work of other, better, programmers), I've developed software that I can use to gig with. I wanted to ensure that as performer I'm integral to the art – allowing my music to be shaped by my key presses as it plays. This can be performed like a musical keyboard (a challenge on a rubber-keyed Speccy!), or by selecting sections of tunes to play next, depending on how I've written each composition. Sometimes I'll use two ZX Spectrums making complementary noises so I can create more complex layered pieces – but still grounded in that recognisable 1-bit sound that drew me in as a child, and that I still want to create music with today. The results can vary from impenetrable artsy-noise, to beautiful chordal pieces that I hope are more than just technical exercises in programming.

CHOON! Andy performing at Machina Bristronica

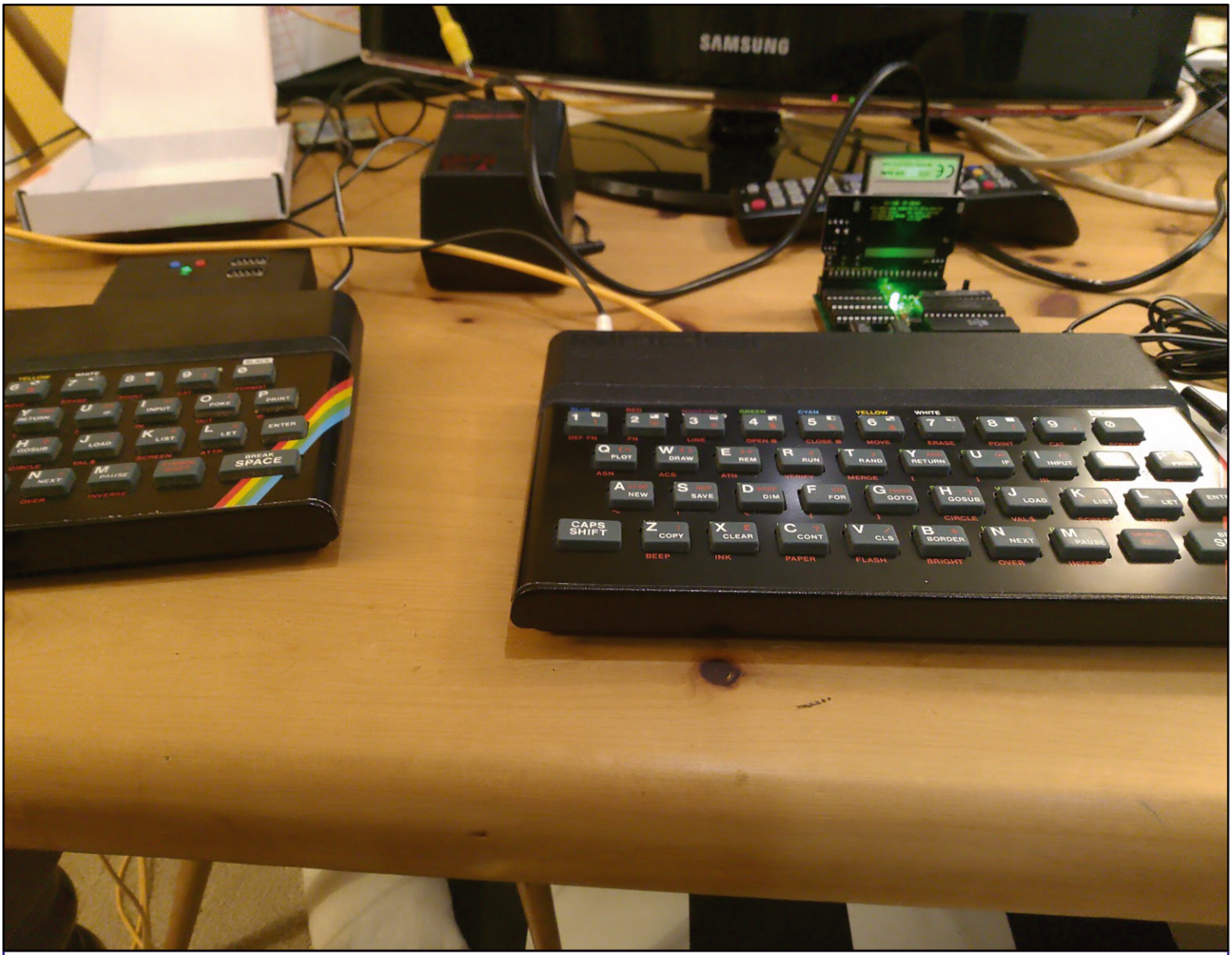
The C64's SID chip may have been a marvel, but the Spectrum's beeper forced ingenuity. From Matthew Smith's interleaved *Hall Of The Mountain King*, to Tim Follin's jaw-dropping routines, to today's Beepola composers and programmers still pushing the envelope, the story of 1-bit music is one of creativity against the odds. My own 1983 Spectrum still plays a part in that story - in galleries, on stage, and in the odd corner of musical theatre. Some hear only a horrible fizz. Others are transported instantly to their childhoods. For me, it remains proof that beauty can come from the most limited of machines.

Andy's software will be made available at SpectrumComputing.co.uk, so you can replay the LCB art installation.

Hardware details :

Gallery Install: Spectrum with composite modded video out, and Comcon programmable joystick interface (Frel, 1984) simulating keypresses using a Joystick. DivMMC to flash load software at the start of the day – keeping it simple for the gallery staff, and keeping grubby fingers off the precious rubber keys. Headphones straight out of the Spectrum!

Live: Two ZX Spectrums into a modular audio mixer and home made volume pedal to adjust levels relative to one another, plus external Korg Kaoss Pad for reverb, if the room deserves it. A DivMMC and DivIDE to flash load my software, and some tellys to peer at.



Andy's twin-Spectrum setup at home, getting dolled-up for a night out on the town...

...and hooked up to the nightclub sound system.

Alien

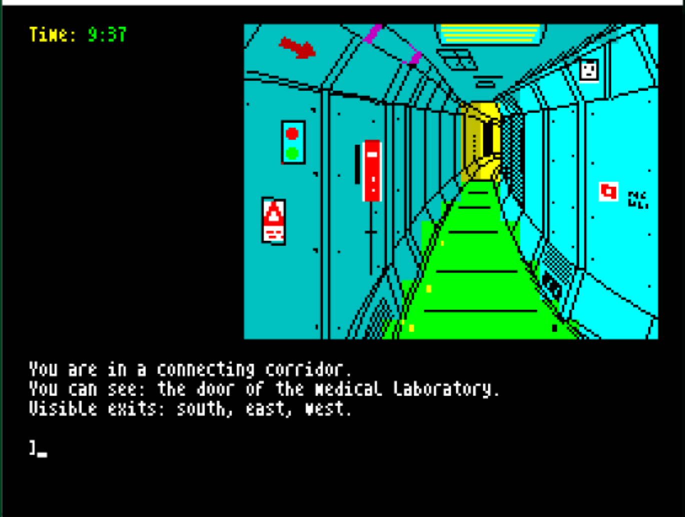
Obsolete.gr after DJS

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/27863

Free

I will never understand text adventures with maps that don't make sense. It's bad enough being stuck in deep space with your comrades being murdered by human and non-human means, without having to deal with a non-Euclidean ship. For instance, here you can go South from the Deck 1 landing to Deck 2, and South from Deck 2 to Deck 1. Deck 3 is, naturally, North of Deck 2, which is East of Deck 3. We haven't even gotten to the puzzles yet, and my head is in a spin.

No matter. This is a fresh English translation of 1988 title Alien, which was included with Italian magazine Load'n'Run, Issue 48. See also Mission Odessa later in this issue, translated by the same hand.



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Time: 9:37

You are in a connecting corridor.
You can see: the door of the medical laboratory.
Visible exits: south, east, west.

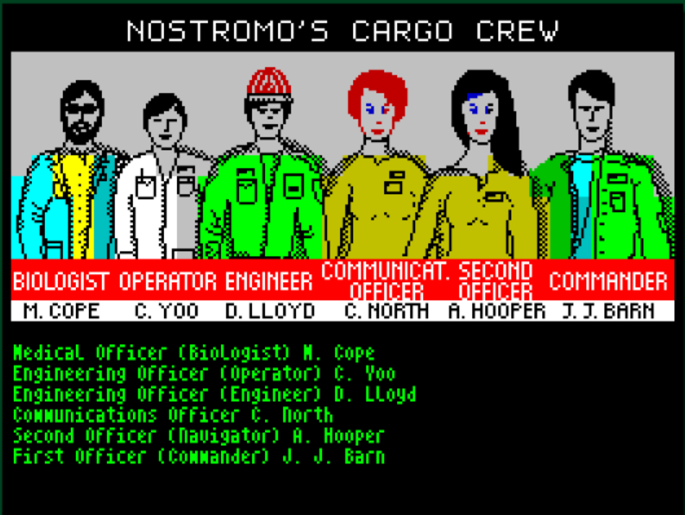
]_
```

Claustrophobic? Me?

The game is, naturally, based loosely on the classic horror movie, although in this iteration your crew mates are already, like Marley, dead to begin with. You'll discover their fates as you wander the spaceship, with the threat of an encounter with a fearsome beast ever present. It's surprisingly tense, and the simplistic story-telling draws you in.

Map weirdness aside, the puzzles are not so challenging, and even having to backtrack to the start room to use the terminal doesn't feel dull, as you are constantly on edge in case the creature randomly jumps out at you.

The parser is a little clunky, and the game has no truck with abbreviations. This rather accentuates the fact that typing is a bit slow, but you can always bump up the CPU speed.

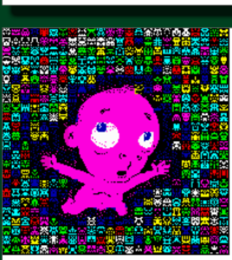


```
Medical Officer (Biologist) M. Cope
Engineering Officer (Operator) C. Yoo
Engineering Officer (Engineer) D. Lloyd
Communications Officer C. North
Second Officer (Navigator) A. Hooper
First Officer (Commander) J. J. Barn
```

Starring Tim Skorrit and Sidorney Waver

I love the style of the graphics, it's worth mentioning, which have popped out of a lengthy hypersleep as crisp as ever. And most of all, I'm happy to say that I made it through, solved the mystery, and vanquished the beast. I don't finish games often, so I'm feeling pretty good about this one.

This is Mpk, last survivor of the Nostromo, signing off.



Beeep. This is Hughes. Sinclavian systems android signing on. There's Commander Mpk, still sound asleep in his reinforced ivory cryopod. Aww. Look at his little face, he's happy about something. Probably fantasising about killing monsters.

I confess that I wasn't that excited to learn that Vag and the team were translating old text adventures. Especially not ones from Load 'n' Run, who are better known for their reputation of peddling unauthorised cracks. I should have guessed from the screenshots alone that my doubts were misplaced, because this adventure is a hidden gem.

The parser could be more responsive, but it keeps pace with a rubber keyboard, which is forgivable (just) for 1988. And the 64 column font adds a bit of polish and gives everything a futuristic tone—even the green on black computer terminal, strangely enough, despite it having more in common with a BBC Micro than an intergalactic mainframe.

There is indeed a real-time sense of tension, as the clock and 'Time passes' prompt won't let you forget. However, the threat of the Alien appearing is better kept in the imagination, as when you do meet it face to face, it's more Ed Wood than Ridley Scott.

With help from the map, "USE COMPUTER", and knowing not to bother with "GET", this is an absorbing short text adventure that anyone can quickly complete. The access code puzzles are better than your key based shenanigans anyday. Thanks to Obsolete.gr for bringing it to a wider audience.

Hit the Fan

Northern Games / DF Design

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44545

PWYW / £2

It's not, as far as I know, explicitly stated what Turdesley, the main character in this game, even is. But the clue is in the name, "Hit the Fan". There are few things which canonically hit fans, and most are footballers and dickhead pop stars. This little guy is neither of those, so all that remains… is, well, a little shit.

I totally get the vibe though. It's easy to grasp and immediate fun, "a little bit woo, a little bit way"… skibidi almost. (FX: sound of millions of Gen Z's and Alphas groaning and flapping themselves in the face with their game controllers at the attempts of grandad over there to sound cool.)

The game mechanics are somewhat "Flappy Bird"-a-like, but I can see why "Hit the Fan" would be the least litigious winner over titles like oo, I dunno, "Flappy Turd". Damn, now I've said that I can't call it anything else. Stupid brain. I'll bet that name was on the table though.

So yeah: in pursuit of the baddy Hair Flick ('ello, 'ello) you flap, to keep yourself aloft or stop flapping and drop to steer yourself up and down through a range of obstacles. The screen scrolls inexorably to the left leaving you little choice in the matter. You can use your left and right controls to help steer you around things.

The first level is clouds, and like a buzz wire game from the school fete, you buzz and lose life when you hit the clouds. Threading the needle you exit each level by grabbing a golden snitch look-a-like flying ball and ducking into a Marioesque sewage pipe.

Once in the drain you get to avoid the germs around the walls and you now have a gun to shoot the little flying enemies with anemometers on their heads. The bullets are Domestos, I suppose. Missed opportunity for an advert there. At the end there's a persistent enemy like a boss which takes a lot of hits before it goes FART, er, PHUT.

Next comes the purple level where the germs from the walls join the fray. And so it goes on. I didn't make it to the final confrontation with Hair Flick, but from the screenshots he looks a lot like Earthworm Jim.

On the (w)hole, Flappy T… er, I mean "Hit the Fan" is an enjoyable though quite hard game of squeezing your mass through a variety of gaps. If you supply enough fibre, um, practice, though, you'll find you can slip through easily and arrive at your destination with a big splash.

As people get more Teflon with this game I'm looking forward to the inevitable speed runs.

TALLY HO!

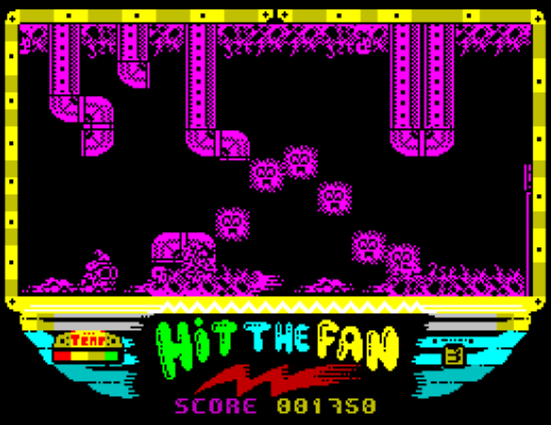
Spectrum games involving toilets are usually well revered or by us old guys and gals; Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy instantly spring to mind. More recently, the excellent splATTR from 2008 had giant toilets flying around.

But what about where our protagonist is actually a poo? This question has been answered before, with several productions from The Death Squad (UK) such as the aptly named 2018 production Pooper Scooper. This Northern Games production, Hit the Fan, is a game featuring feces, but is it really that shit? Or is it *the shit*?

Let me go over what I like here. The AY music, sampled speech, general presentation and graphics are all good, especially the smooth scrolling. It's also a game in good humour, even if the mood is somewhat juvenile or could be aimed at teenagers.

The first level eases you into the game proper, but I do find that the constant drag of gravity makes the game more difficult. The busy level designs compete with the issue of staying at one horizontal position easily, which distracts me slightly. There's also a small issue of the fire power being somewhat underwhelming, but nothing that an autofire joystick cannot overcome.Your mileage may vary and I tend towards easier games for a reason.

Whilst there is a lot of polish here, I feel that a few tweaks to the mechanics, or an easy mode, would improve things. But these are personal niggles, and there's nothing here that practice couldn't overcome.



Germaphobes beware

Urkiola Trilogy

Darkside29

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44407

PWYW / $2

Adventure games are something that I'd always try to play through, but never get very far with. I remember fondly though Adventureland 1 and other Scott Adams games, and later Magnetic Scrolls' excellent Fish! But the Urkiola Trilogy is a different kind of graphical or text adventure, as it's more like the "choose your own adventure" books but without the dice.

Read the paragraph or short description, make a decision, and turn the page to continue on your quest. As I once observed, such books were my favourites (especially the Fighting Fantasy series) because they put me in the centre of it all; I became the main character in someone else's story, guided by the odd dice throw or bad decision, kind of just like being an adult as I have found out since.

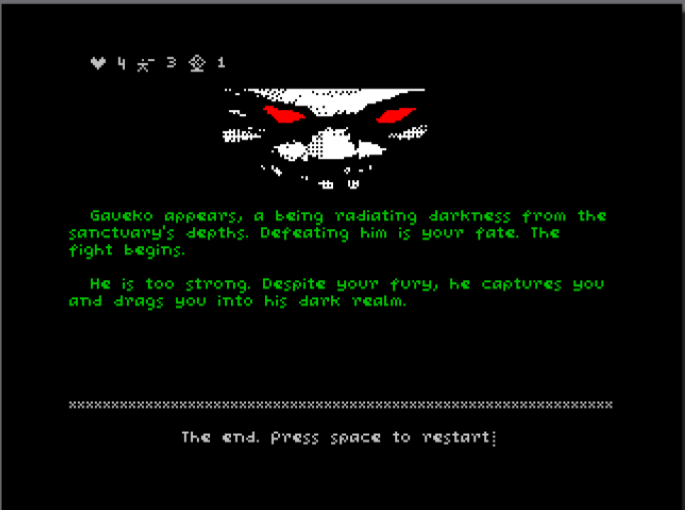
The Urkiola Trilogy's Game 1 is a good segue into the whole experience, although you don't have to play these games in any particular order. The stories told in these games are based on Basque mythology; unravelling the mystery to save your compatriots. Make too many wrong decisions and you're quickly starting again, trying to remember your previous actions to survive a little longer each time.

Game 1 is set during the 1980s on a rather foreboding Christmas night. It was a great day playing games on the world's most favouritest computer: the Sinclair ZX Spectrum. But now, strange things are afoot. Awoken to an apparently empty house, something is just not right: the once calm family residence has an eerie feel to it. The sky is an unusual shade of green, and the feeling in your stomach is sickening. Slowly, uneasily, you are tasked with exploring the familial home with daring and trepidation in equal measure. Only you can save the day.

Exploring each location in any game in this trilogy does not require typing. For each room, you are given a list of options (more precisely, actions) in a menu; scroll down and select one and you will either move to another location, or a clue will be presented, or the plot will expand further. You will find and interact with characters, who may be family members, friends, neighbours, priests… But beware: not all are who he or she appears to be.

Using a 4 bit font for the text on these games is a brave choice, and whilst modern emulators and even modern ZX Spectrum compatible computers may be able to handle and display the text clearly, those still using real hardware with a CRT television set may be at a disadvantage here. Although it looks okay on my Omni 128HD, I do recommend a 16:9 aspect ratio for reading, unless your eyesight is very good.

There are three very good games here; Game 2 is set in Roman times, presumably around 2,000 years ago, and Game 3 is set in the 1930s. Even for someone like me, who lacks perspicacity, things are not too taxing on the grey matter, and there is enough to explore and become lost in. But before you venture into these binary worlds, I do recommend reading the fairly extensive explanation on the itch.io page.



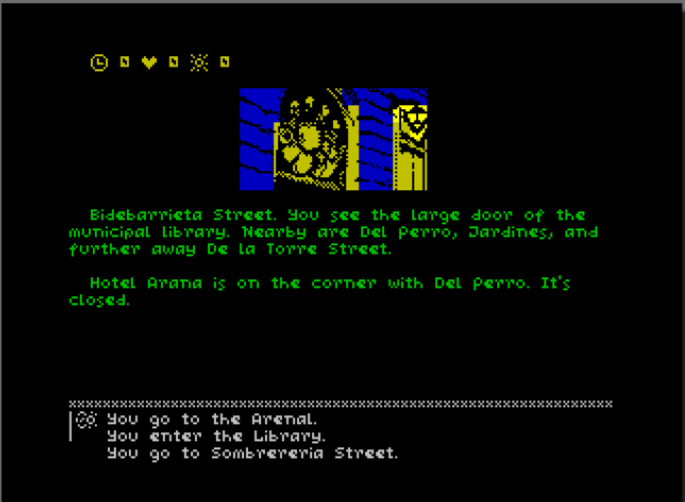
Gaveko appears, a being radiating darkness from the sanctuary's depths. Defeating him is your fate. The fight begins.

He is too strong. Despite your fury, he captures you and drags you into his dark realm.

The end. Press space to restart

Don't you hate when that happens?

To summarise, actions are pre-defined by location so you're not left guessing what the command parser understands. You won't see any prompts similar to *I don't understand that* because you've described an object incorrectly, or a typo has crept in on your usual impeccable typing. This trilogy has dual appeal, for fans of "interactive fiction", and for gamers who want a good story (mostly told through one's imagination, like all good adventure games) but don't like the typey bits. If you've never been a text adventure fan, try this, you may be surprised and engrossed in equal measures.



Bidebarrieta Street. You see the large door of the municipal library. Nearby are Del Perro, Jardines, and further away De la Torre Street.

Hotel Arana is on the corner with Del Perro. It's closed.

You go to the Arenal.
You enter the Library.
You go to Sombrereria Street.

It's just like an open-top tour bus

Variety is the spice of life, as they say, and the 3 distinct time periods in these 3 games are very spicy indeed, and vary in moods as well as setting.

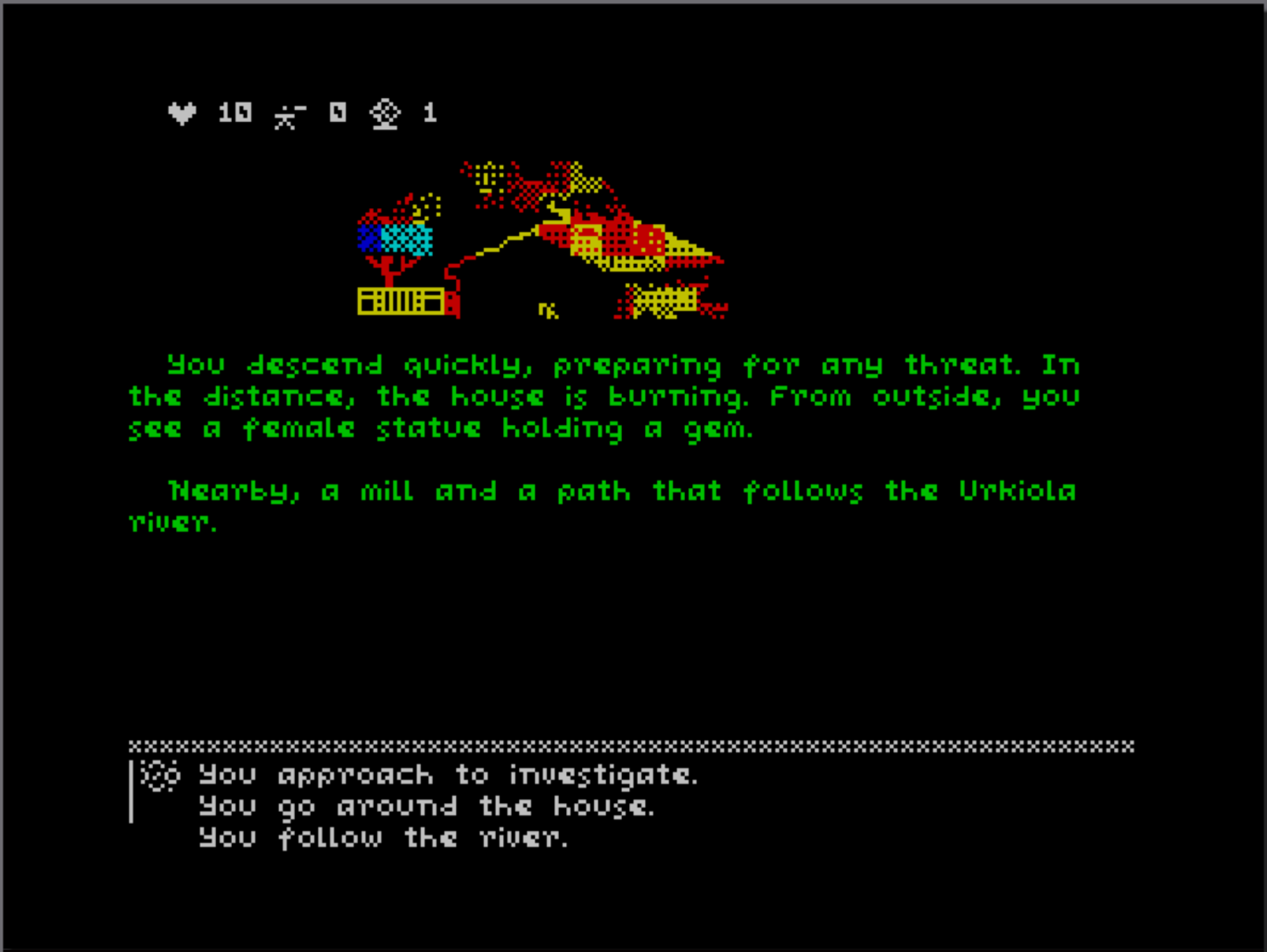
The opener has a claustrophobic feel, as your deserted family home is beseiged by monstrous killers. This is the most straight-forward of the set, and you'll learn the rules pretty quickly. There are sudden-death options, and trial-and-error exploration here will inevitably see your health whittled down. It may seem unfair occasionally, but the gameplay is finding out what sequence to do things in. The bad moves and deaths are colorfully described, which adds a little fun to failure. The menu-driven interface means that replaying from the start is no chore either, as you're not typing anything in.

Part 2, set in the ouskirts of a falling Roman Empire, was my favourite section, with an environment that feels expansive and wide open, and intriguing plot hooks to pull you in various directions. The interaction here with the Basque gods and creatures (as described in the manual) is fresh, and gives you the sense of living through an epic folk-tale.

Part 3, an unabashedly noirish, Lovecraft-vibed 1930s tale, felt a bit baffling at first, with the plot pushed on you a little. You have a mission here, more explicitly than you do in the other sections, but I felt like I was wandering aimlessly around the city for a while before figuring out what how to proceed.

The Mucho engine used here though is, as Shaun points out, a great mid-point for everyone who always wanted to play text adventures but got frustrated with the parser. You get to read and make choices, without worrying about typos or exact phrasing. This seems to give the authors a lot of freedom to make those choices meaningful too, with the focus zoomed out from the traditional fine detail-level to a broader scope.

All together, this trilogy is ambitious, varied and satisfying - one of the best games in this engine. The Basque folk-lore elements were unfamiliar to me, and I enjoyed getting to know that world a little. The English writing has a few non-native peculiarities, but nothing significant. Presentation is excellent, with some very attractive imagery. And there's even a topless lady in part 2, if that might sway your opinion. Something for everyone!



You descend quickly, preparing for any threat. In the distance, the house is burning. From outside, you see a female statue holding a gem.

Nearby, a mill and a path that follows the Urkiola river.

You approach to investigate.
You go around the house.
You follow the river.

Talking Heads have been, I see

Mission : Odessa

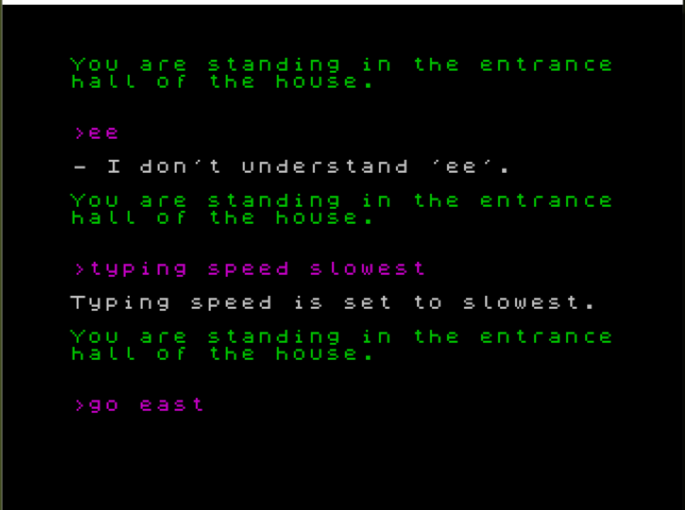
Obsolete.gr after Paolo Giorgi

https://obsoletegr.itch.io/mission-odessa

Free

Spycraft is all about patience. Biding your time, waiting for the pieces to come together slowly. And let me tell you : Mission Odessa, a post-war spy thriller set in the ruins of Berlin, will test your patience, initially at least.

This release is an English-language translation of an Italian game from 1986, using the same bespoke BASIC parser as the original. As a result, every command will be followed by a lengthy pause (like, 5 seconds or so) as the code slogs through its dictionary. Which sounds like a show-stopping chore. Rather brilliantly, however, there is an option in the parser to slow down the sensitivity of the input. This allows you to bump up the CPU speed in your emulator without making it impossible to type accurately. I settled on 800% CPU and the slowest typing speed. Not an option on real hardware of course, but a clever solution for those of us on emulators.



```
You are standing in the entrance
hall of the house.

>ee

- I don't understand 'ee'.

You are standing in the entrance
hall of the house.

>typing speed slowest

Typing speed is set to slowest.

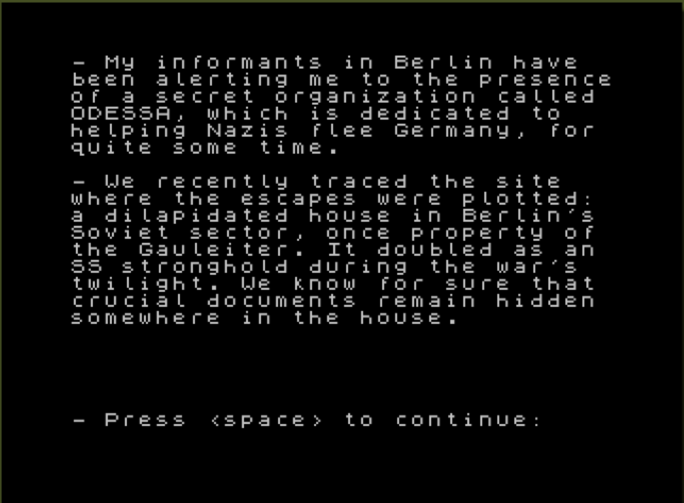
You are standing in the entrance
hall of the house.

>go east
```

Ssseenssitivvittty Correeccteedd

Technical issues dealt with, we get to dig into the game. A lengthy intro describes the situation : you've been sent to investigate an abandoned Nazi site. No, not Twitter : an derelict, bombed out building in East Berlin, where Nazi and Soviet forces alike will try to thwart your search for the titular Odessa List, a dossier of escaped SS officers. High stakes!

It's a very 80's game : the first obstacle you'll need to overcome is finding a lamp so you don't trip over and die in the dark. There are sudden deaths (Don't enter the lift). The location descriptions are very short, and don't describe the exits.There's an inventory limit as well, itself constituting is another puzzle to work around, and a rather tight time limit.



```
- My informants in Berlin have
been alerting me to the presence
of a secret organization called
ODESSA, which is dedicated to
helping Nazis flee Germany, for
quite some time.

- We recently traced the site
where the escapes were plotted:
a dilapidated house in Berlin's
Soviet sector, once property of
the Gauleiter. It doubled as an
SS stronghold during the war's
twilight. We know for sure that
crucial documents remain hidden
somewhere in the house.



- Press <space> to continue:
```

Listen very carefully, we shall say this only once.

Nothing's too difficult though, and there is both a step-by-step solution and a slightly more vague walkthrough provided, so no-one should get fully stuck. And there's a map available as well, which makes up for the missing exits in the text, but is a bit spoilery. This simple, very old school, Nazi-thwarting adventure is a welcome translation.

Ah, the Nazis, history's ultimate villains. Apart from gifting us the Autobahn, methadone, Volkswagen, helicopters, Fanta, and Germany's economic recovery (who knew?), they also provided the perfect caricature of evil. The kind you can punch, shoot, or blow up with zero moral qualms. For Brits especially, they're the fantasy antagonists we love to hate, a bottomless well for movies, books, and, of course, games. And that's exactly where Mission Odessa comes in.

This old-school adventure drops you into recently-liberated Berlin with one clear objective: wreak havoc. Unfortunately, the havoc starts with the game itself. The custom parser is painfully slow, chugging along like a wounded tank.

Once you're in, prepare for a trial-and-error gauntlet. Room descriptions omit cardinal directions, leaving you to stumble blindly through the dark (sometimes literally). Sudden deaths lurk around every corner, and even with a walk-through, progress feels like defusing a bomb with oven mitts on.

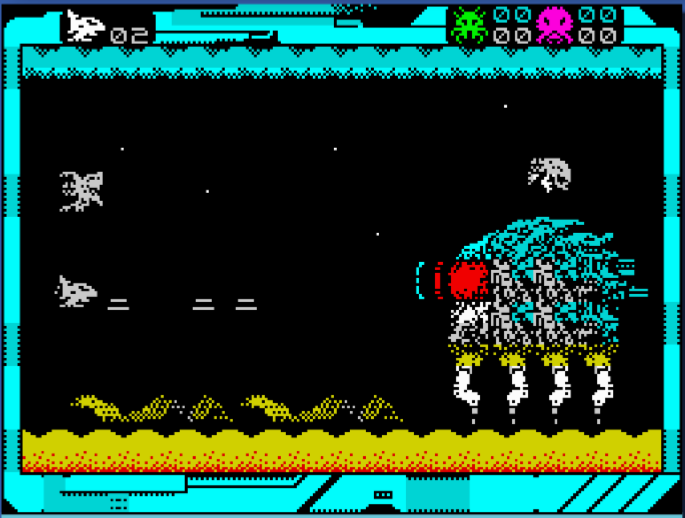
The premise is undeniably cool—who doesn't love a righteous Nazi-foiling secret mission? But the execution feels like a relic in need of modernisation. A port to the DAAD system (or any less agonising engine) could do wonders. As it stands, Mission to Odessa makes you work far too hard for the pleasure of virtually stopping fascists' evil plans. A noble cause, but a punishing game.

Galacic Nexus

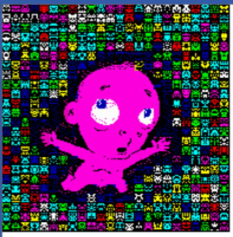
Tartessos Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44490

Free



One ugly melonfarmer



Following on from their previous masterpiece, err 'Master Piece'*, Tartessos Games continue to use the MK1 engine in groundbreaking ways. This time it's a horizontally scrolling shmup, that sees our galaxy under threat from hideous aliens and their minions. Fortunately, we have the 'Galacic Nexus'—a small spacecraft that is our only hope™, and a brave hero to fly it®. Basically it's got all the tropes you'd want to see in a shoot-em-up.

The core of the game is flying along and shooting a set number of aliens. There are a couple of species per stage: you need to get 20 of the cannon fodder type, and a few of the slightly harder elites. If that wasn't task enough, you are beleaguered by impish hands snatching at you from below, lighting strikes from above, and meteorite showers from all angles. Why you have to fulfil a quota I don't know. Speaking as an intergalactic space hero I'm sick of all this red tape from the pencil pushers sat in their comfy back offices. They'll be docking my pay next for borrowing the Xenite crystals to power my Fiat-126.

Anyway, once you've bagged enough aliens, it's time for a boss. There are four in total, all big and suitably repulsive, with their sensitive parts just exposed enough for you aim at while it hems you in and throws various hazards your way. One of these days, there'll be an alien boss that doesn't dangle its delicate bits in plain sight, and then we'll all be in trouble.

The presentation is okay, but the graphics sometimes look scruffy, as if they've been digitised and reduced without clean up. However, the music is well curated, with an AY track that skews 'derring-do' for the main levels, and some intimidating mood music for the bosses.

The scrolling effect is achieved by only rotating the floor and ceiling, which works well enough, but you won't be in any doubt of what is (and isn't) going on under the hood. You don't get long to appreciate the scenery anyway, as the crafty alien attacks keep you busy. Try as I might, there are no places to hide.

The game deviates from the rule book by not having power ups, apart from sparsely scattered extra lives. But therein lies the challenge—the power of the Galacic Nexus comes down to the skill of the pilot and careful use of those 3 bullets. So go to the mirror and tell yourself that you're the best goddam space pilot there is, the galaxy is counting on you...

Okay, thanks, Dave! I took your advice, stood in front of the mirror, said the words, and now I'm all fired up!

There is a lot to love here, and the game design is far more sophisticated than it first appeared. At the start of Level 1, I thought this was purely a dodging game - taking out enemies seemed too risky, and it was easier to just stay out of harm's way. But by level one's halfway point, the game had completely flipped the script. I was desperately making every bullet count, dodging and weaving through a swarm of aliens hell-bent on my destruction.

So the first major plus is the brilliant learning curve. Considering how simple the game seemed initially, the way the difficulty slowly ramps up made me feel like a boiled frog… a boiled frog in space. Yeah!

This is another game that completely charmed me. With its great music, slick intro, and perfectly paced action, it's a genuine little gem. I do wish it had power-ups and maybe cut the movement inertia, but that doesn't change the fact that this is an absolute blast, a solid, well made shooter that's absolutely worth your time. Now if you'll excuse me, I have some aliens to vaporise!

AND OUR HERO...

…has forgotten his positive affirmations?

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*An ACE in Issue 1

Scrapyard Skedaddle

MavTheRave

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44857

PWYW / £1.50

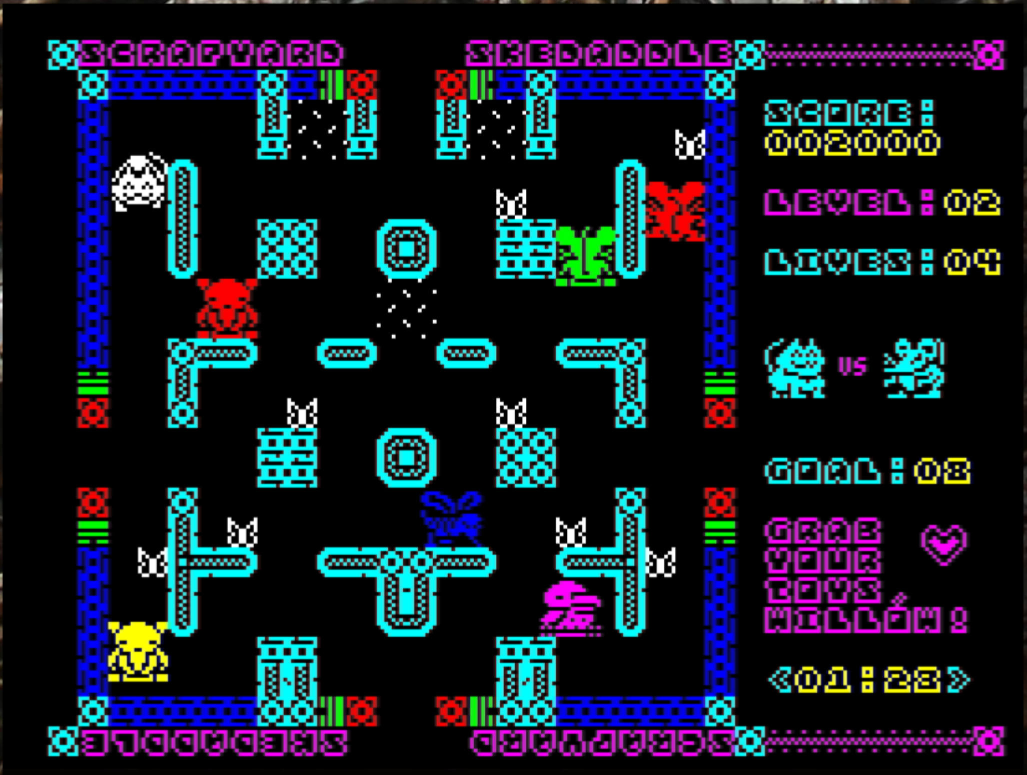
If you've ever looked at Pac-Man and thought it needed more feline attitude and a Sonic-style spin dash, then "Scrapyard Skedaddle" is the game you never knew you were waiting for. This charming, challenging, and well-presented arcade-style game throws you into the paws of a nimble cat navigating Pac-Man-like mazes with two options for pace - a strategic trot and a satisfying, high-stakes Sonic-style roll.

The core gameplay will be familiar to you, but it is executed well thanks to the MPAGD engine. You can opt (as I did) to hold the 'M' key firmly down, go into the Sonic-style dash-roll, and dart through labyrinthine junk yards, collecting items while avoiding a colourful cast of nicely animated adversaries. Or you can take a more cautious approach and only use the dash when needed. Essentially, holding 'M' sends your cat curling into a ball, granting a welcome burst of speed that is a lot of fun to control. Sadly, you're not invincible during this move, however, neither is it just for show; this extra speed is important to outmanoeuvre enemies and make tight escapes on corners that tend to slow you down but not your pursuers.
The "scrapyard" aesthetic is certainly a visual treat. The game is bursting with personality, from the detailed, colourful locations to the well-animated sprites. It has a polished, arcade feel that pops off the screen, complemented by snappy sound effects rather than any actual music.

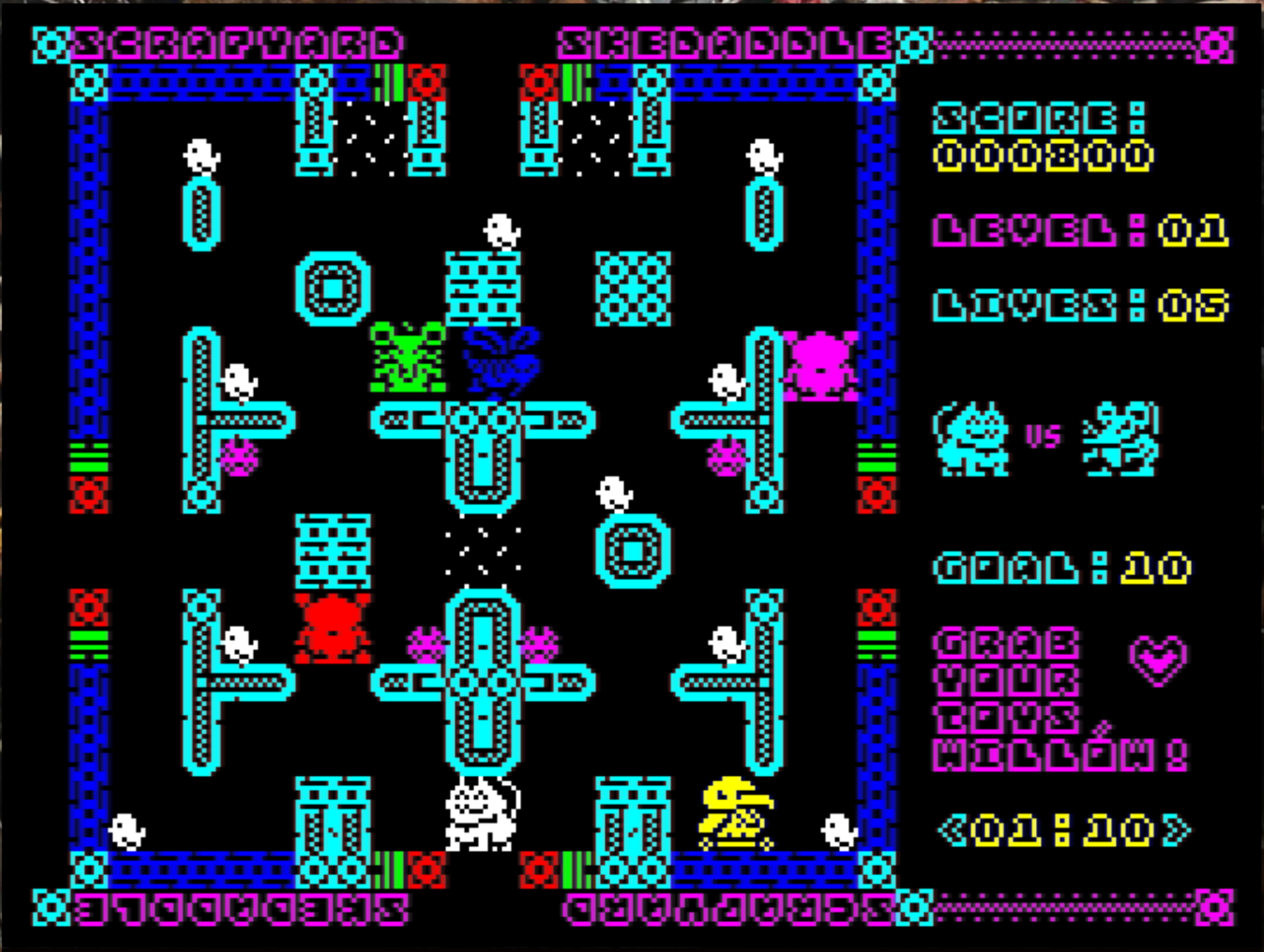
However, "Scrapyard Skedaddle" is not a casual stroll. The difficulty is steep, and I found that pure reaction time isn't enough. Success hinges on memorisation. Learning enemy patrol routes, the layout of each maze, and safe spots becomes an absolute necessity.

Yet, taking time to learn the levels felt rewarding. The feeling of finally clearing a stage at top speed, M key wedged firmly down, was a lot of fun! Each completed stage feels like a hard-earned victory, a puzzle solved through repetition and learned patterns. The game reveals itself not to be a test of reflexes, but rather a strategic memory challenge.

"Scrapyard Skedaddle" is a polished attempt to emulate classic, colourful, arcade games of the 1980s. It has great presentation, and the core rolling mechanic helps set it apart from its peers. However, its significant reliance on memorisation over pure twitch reflexes means you will need patience to see all the good it has to offer.



Like a cat down a drainpipe



No need to look that pleased with yourself

Some sad news to start with — I'm writing this review from my sickbed (sniffle, cough). I mention this for TWO reasons:

First, to impress upon our readers the extraordinary lengths our writers here at Breakspace Towers go to in order to bring you up-to-the-minute reviews of all the latest Spec-games! (Well... up-to-the-minute every quarter.) Neither sleet, nor snow, nor fevered ailment shall halt our sacred duty to the Speccy faithful!

Secondly, so you can fully appreciate my first impressions after booting up this game. A multitude of bright neon colours shot out from the screen — Was this a fever dream? Did the game really look like this, or had I just had one too many Lemsips? (A-choo!)

This is, without question, the most colourful Speccy game I can ever remember playing. I can easily imagine it being a massive hit in the arcades, drawing gamers in by its aesthetics alone. The gameplay is pure Pac-Man, with the added bonus of a kitty speed-roll that really livens things up. The game is extremely unforgiving, however, and gets very difficult very fast. Rolling around with abandon while holding the M button is tempting, but that tactic won't get you far — you'll end up rolling straight into a rat (and sudden death) more often than not. It quickly becomes a matter of memorising the routes of the "rat gang" rather than relying on your reflexes (not that I have any at the moment — cough, sniffle, a-choo!).

Overall, it's an extremely polished visual extravaganza which, if it had a slightly gentler difficulty curve, would be a very playable game. (A-a-a-choo! I'm off to have some soup!)

Castle Capers 2

Gabriele Amore

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44549

Free

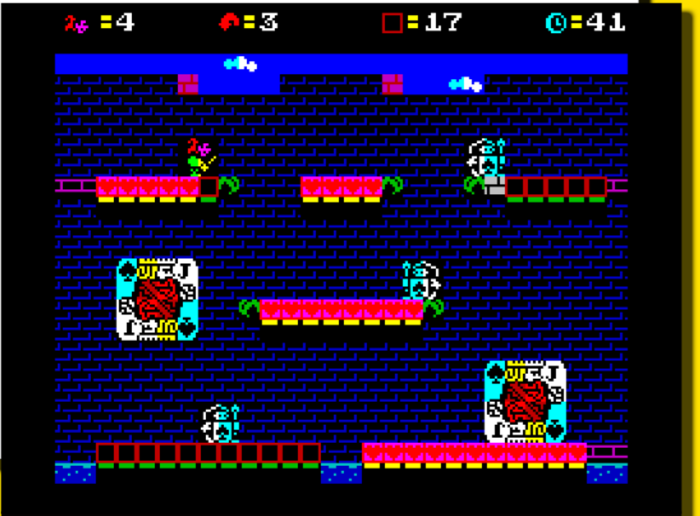
Following hot on the heels of the superb Bubble Cop, Castle Capers 2 is the sequel to Gabriele Amore's tough but fun 2017 single screen platformer, Castle Capers. This time around, rather than an apprentice wizard rescuing fairies, you play as a jester tasked with restoring the Kingdom to the Queen of Hearts. This quest is achieved by covering each floor with hearts whilst avoiding an array of patrolling nasties across each of the 10 levels. Once the floors are covered, this summons the Queen herself to bestow some zapping power to your Jester, helping you turn the tables on the killer cards, wiping them out and progressing through to the next level, until the final showdown with the King of Spades himself.

I feel very at home with this sort of caper, single screen platformers are kinda of my "thing" and this one's a corker. It brings to mind the likes of the Next's Night Knight, as well as some of Gabriele's previous works.

Eight years of evolution of the author's techniques really show, the game is full of Gabriele's trademark colourful cartoon sprites and backgrounds, with the anthropomorphic regal playing cards giving a real Alice in Wonderland feel to proceedings.

Castle Capers 2 also features very handy skip and reset features, which allow you to experience all 10 levels, even if your skills aren't quite up to the task. The game is so perfectly paced however, that you do benefit from progressing linearly through the levels to learn the techniques rather than skipping to the end.

All in all, this is another top tier release from Gabriele Amore and if the rumour is true that it is to be his last Speccy game, then he's certainly gone out on a high and left a legacy of software that we are extremely fortunate to be able to experience.



Play your cards right

First up, let's give a shoutout to Lee Bee, whose jaunty ear-worm of a soundtrack will haunt your dreams. But in a good way. It's a lovely audio polish that matches the sheen of the characterful sprite work. The playing card guards and assorted royalty are very Alice in Wonderland, all the lines are uncluttered and clean.

On paper, this is very slight. 10 levels sure sounds like small number of levels for such an apparently simple game. You just run left and right. You don't even jump. You can shoot, but only when the Queen shows up and gives you a go of her wand at the end of each level. It would be a lot easier, Your Majesty, if you give it to me at the blimming start. Could I interest you in a Constitutional Parliament at all? No? Maybe later.

But small does not mean that it's a pushover. The difficulty spirals upwards steadily, adding tricks and obstacles at every stage. 5 lives is tight, and the time limit is an unfeeling brute. The levels are wrap-around from the bottom - fall through the floor and you appear at the ceiling. As you can't jump and there are no ladders, this means that always falling down, which is the perfectly set up for you to make a tiny mistake or oversight and realise it moments later - just too late to rectify it. Just the right level of frustration, in fact.

The occasional graphical corruption which Jamie mentions didn't bother me so much, and personally, I got huge enjoyment from learning by failing, and pushing through to the magical end. Which makes this one of my favourites in a packed issue. No jesting.

Take a deck of cards and start to build a house. It's always more fun than solitaire. At first, it's easy, and soon your structure rises above the kitchen table - it starts to become something rather fascinating. Elegant. Beautifully crafted. But the further you go with your creation, the more the danger creeps in. One wrong move and it all tumbles to the ground. Every layer introduces new complexity to deal with. Every new card placed relies not just on itself, but on the structure as a whole. In the end, these are cards, not bricks - you have bent the concept as far as it can go and as everything falls. The cards flutter to the ground leaving you to wonder what the point of the last half hour was.

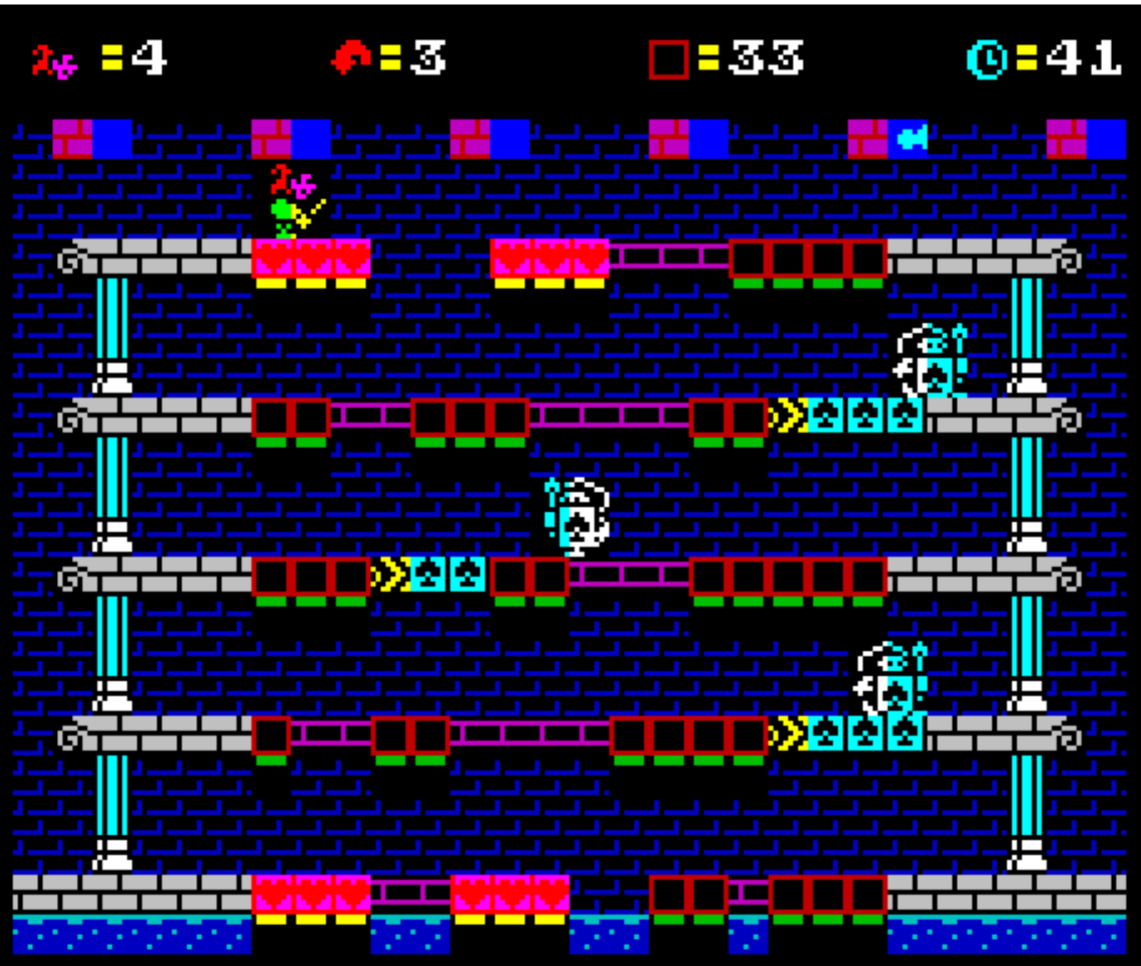
And so here I am, reviewing Castle Capers 2, Gabriele Amore’s last game (possibly, probably). Spectrum Computing attributes 51 games to Gabriele. What a prolific career on the retro scene. The game is authored with AGDx. It's designed for games with small sprites, but Gabriele is a true master of this form and has managed to create large, colourful games with this engine. Castle Capers 2 is no exception. As someone who has used AGDx myself, what he was able to achieve is mind-bogglingly impressive. It's an incredibly elegant house of cards: smooth gameplay, fantastic music, bright, large sprites - everything is here. But at the same time, this game is surely pushing AGDx to its very limits, and there are signs that this house of cards is teetering on the brink.

The game is a painting game where you must walk over every section of the floor, turning it to hearts. All the while, patrolling guards resembling playing cards try to stop you. Once the painting phase is over, the Queen of Hearts appears and gives you a laser gun. Now you must blast the guards into oblivion to complete each level.

Later stages introduce new gameplay mechanics: collapsing floors, and a king that unpaints your work. Still, I'm shook at what Gabriele was able to squeeze out of AGDx. But it's in the later levels where this tower of cards begins to wobble: artifacts appear on the screen, sprites are not erased as they move, and then, in a moment of utter confusion, I died. This inexplicably took me to a new level rather than restarting the current one, as one would normally expect.

But even if the house of cards came tumbling down at that point, it hardly mattered. The game is very fun, super impressive, and I enjoyed playing it immensely.

In the end, Castle Capers 2, a playing-card-themed game, is a fitting final chapter. The 50 other games provide the foundation, acting as their own house of cards, until we arrive at the end of the journey. Gabriele didn't play it safe; he pushed further, until the structure could no longer support the ambition of the artist, and the house of cards came tumbling down. But this is a triumph, not a disaster, because as everything falls, you understand: beauty is never found in permanence, but only in the ephemeral.



The best columns on the Spectrum?

Amore Senza Amaro

One of the most prolific indie developers the Spectrum has ever seen, Gabriele Amore, is putting his Spectrum development days aside, or, we can hope, on hold.

Mpk and Dave sat down for a chat with the great man.

BreakSpace : **Gabriele grew up in Palermo, Italy, and was 15 in 1984 when computers begain to catch his eye. So we asked, naturally : Why the Spectrum?**

Gabriele Amore : I had a general passion for computer games, and would have loved to get an Intellivision or Colecovison : Intellivision was doing well, with very few getting its rival. The Atari VCS was also available, but was too primitive and expensive. My father thought video games were garbage however, and refused to buy any of them - 'they will make you dumb', he would say. I wonder if he wasn't correct.

At some point we started to see computers, and I had no idea about the Spectrum except a friend of mine got one, and he told me that it was a wonderful machine - I should get one too. And very cheap. I went to see it at a local store and fell in love immediately.

I could convince my father, who liked that it was not so expensive, and he liked that it was a modular system that you could expand. So I got a 16kb Spectrum. And then spent a whole summer saving money to buy an expansion RAM pack.

BS : And did your father think that you could do more than just play games?

GA : *I* was actually thinking that. But then...I tried. For a while. I even bought manuals. I remember something called "15 graphical games for the Zx Spectrum". The manual was fine at first working with BASIC as far as LINE, CIRCLE and so on, but then I got to PEEK, POKE and beyond - it was flying over my head.

BS : What commercial games did you enjoy at that time?

GA : The first 48K game I remember spending long afternoons playing was "Scuba Dive" by Durrel.. Man! THAT game was awesome! So much depth - even literally speaking. Such a sense of exploration and adventure... this game blew my mind as well as that of my friends (even if some of them would notice the color clash ...)

Other games I remember fondly are *Ant Attack*, *Knight Lore* (even though at some point all these isometric games started to feel like "more of the same") and an amazing game called *Dark Star*" (a *Star Wars* kind of game). My best friend on the other hand loved *Tornado Low Level*

There was something that bothered me though ... this thing of the color clash which I was not aware at the time I bought the machine, was a real "stain" for me - especially in comparison with those friends of mine that had the CBM64.

BS : Was the Spectrum popular in Italy?

GA : Well I don't know about Italy overall, but I suspect it was not at all common. There were not so many "Spectrumisti" in Palermo and it was hard to find it in shops. At some point around 1985 or so it completely disappeared. And in my school there was just me and that other friend... all the other kids had CBM64.

In Italy, it was common to buy pirate tapes at the newsstand : you would get maybe 10 games for 10,000 Lira (about 10 Euro today). The games would be translated or changed - 'Underwurlde would become 'Sottoterra' or something similar.

The sad thing was that tapes were recorded on both sides - one side would be Spectrum, the other side was CBM 64 games, and the screenshots of the CBM versions always looked better to me. 'Why did I get this Spectrum!' The Commodore was of course more than twice, maybe 3 times as expensive to buy. I had a friend with a CBM that invited us over and would show off his games… I did not get a great feeling.

BS : Is this the reason you're leaving the Spectrum? Defecting to the C64?

GA : No, no, no!

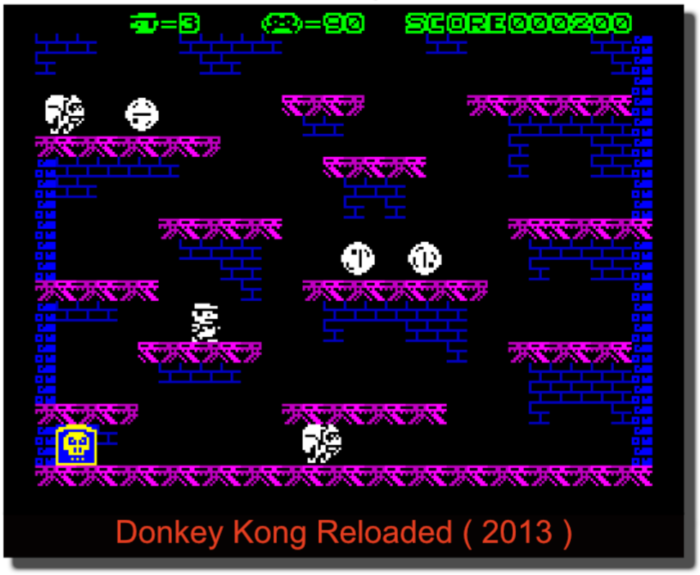
And, you know, I still have my Spectrum, and it still works. I lost track of it at some point, but I found it about 10 years ago. My father had given me some old wine boxes with my stuff, and in about 2015 I went through them and there was the Spectrum, tape recorder, some tapes. I had to replace the keyboard membrane, hooked it up to a TV with RCA input, and can load games just fine.

BS : When did you stop using your Spectrum originally?

GA : About 1987 or so. I finished high school, and at that age, you didn't look back. You'd either move on to something more evolved, like Amiga or something, or just quit games. I quit. I had more entertaining options, I guess!

I did buy an Atari Lynx handheld at some point, which I used a little bit. I still have it somewhere. I do remember seeing some Spectrum demos in about 2005 that amazed me. I knew I had owned that computer, but it never looked so good when I had it!

I did not deal really with the Spectrum from the end of the 80s to the 2010s. At some point, I came across a website, possibly Sinclair Infoseek, where you could play the old games online. Then I saw some videos by Paul Jenkinson about AGD, and I thought maybe I could try something… I made a game - Donkey Kong Reloaded, which is an awful game, but for some reason it made a big impact.



Donkey Kong Reloaded (2013)

BS : I thought it was good!

GA : Ehh, yeah. It's okay. I had messaged a lot with Paul and Alessandro Grussu, who were very patient as I was learning the system. Alessandro pointed me to WOS, where Paul was advertising the game, and people for some reason were discussing the game passionately …

That was a really nice feeling!

And that made me think 'Cool - I can make games.'

BS : Is it the process of making the games, or the community engagement that's more important to you?

GA : Both. Making games is a way of finding a solution for a certain problem; but feeling appreciated by the community is really comforting. It helps a lot when you feel isolated.

At that point, around 2010/11, I was facing a critical phase in my life. I had lost my job as a researcher in Biology, after investing years of study. I'd spent 9 years in the USA, studying and working at Caltech. I'd gotten a position in Italy, but then that was gone. It was a tough time for me - especially because I had a young kid.

And so, in this situation, where everything was crumbling, it was good to find something where I could say 'do this..' and it would do it.

BS : Something you could control?

GA : I guess, yes, that was the reason. And I got some kind of an addiction to this. I was coding all the time. I couldn't stop doing it. This shows, I think, with the number of games I have made. Some ridiculous high number. Many times, I would say that I should stop and focus on something more serious…but making games is so much fun.

BS : So were you writing games in the evenings, into the night?

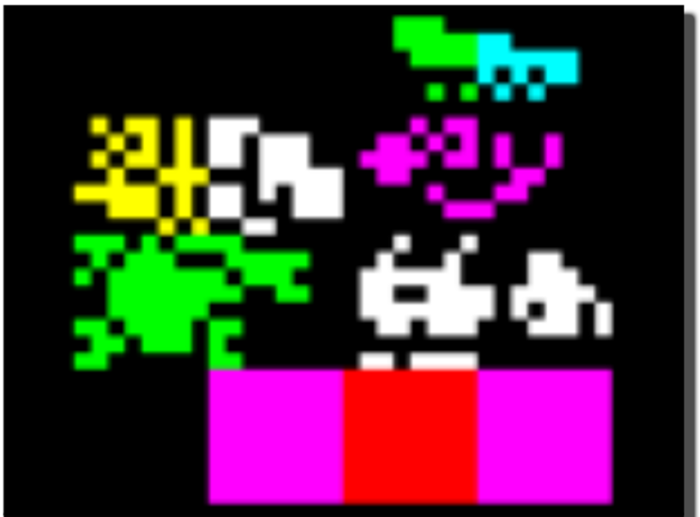
GA : You cannot believe this. There was a phase where I had a new job which I hated, very basic. Doing a job which you don't care about is a terrible thing. I was in calls with people in work, and working on games in CGD on my screen. Working on games like Push'n'Chase at that time.

Luckily I moved to a new job - teaching Maths and Science in 6th - 8th grade, and in the last few years I've been additionally working on teacher training with the

University. Learning how to write code in AGD helped me a lot - I even used AGD to teach the kids programming initially, although I've moved to using Scratch now.

BS : It's interesting that you've moved to Scratch from AGD. The Bearsden school uses AGD to create games.

GA : Scratch and AGD have similar structures. You define sprites in one window, then there's a code window... But for the kids it's more interesting to create a game for modern computers. Scratch is more accessible. But some kids ask me to switch to AGD. They seem to like this kind of 8-bit graphics. Especially my more colourful games like Sheepish or Omelettes for Breakfast, they seem to enjoy.



The Chef from Omelettes for Breakfast (2017)

BS : Does your son have any interest in Spectrum games?

GA : You know, this is weird. Sometimes he asks me, but he has a friend that loves the Spectrum, it's strange. He always asks if I've made any new games. But mostly my son is more into the modern games, of course.

BS : My own daughter will stop and watch if I'm playing a Spectrum game on the TV. 'Ooh, Pixels!' She's played Manic Miner up as far as Eugene's Lair.

GA : Between you and I : I hate Manic Miner. Can't stand it. I loved when it came out. But so difficult, frustrating. I understand when it came out, it was great, but there are so many games, then and now, that play the same. Too many clones.

BS : A lot of people prefer your games with smooth sprites like 'Leonardo's Lost Last Invention', rather than your big, colourful blocky ones. Did you ever consider going back to the these?

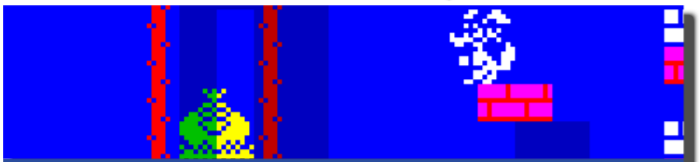
GA : No. Working with blocks is more fun for me. I still got smooth movement, starting with Pengo Mini, Bomber Pengo.

I got really good movement with 16x16 characters with Sheepish. I love that game. This was the game I always wanted to make, really. It has my style in the characters, cartoon humour.

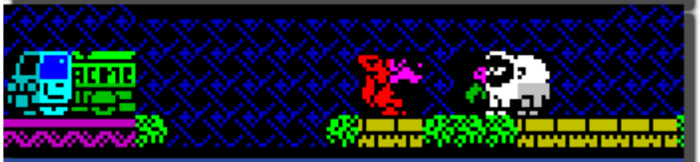
Sprites with just one colour look flat to me, I never wanted to go back to that.

BS : Your style comes through strongest in the colourful games, like with Albert the Wolf in Sheepish. It's like a mini-Don Priestly game.

GA : That's a big compliment! There are not so many games from other people that I go back to - El Stompo is one that I love. I love the graphics. They are so right. People should invest more in the graphics - they make a huge difference to the level of enjoyment for me. All the little touches make a big difference.



Wanna-be egg-thief Albert The Wolf (2014)…



…back again in Sheepish (2024)

BS : The problem may be Denis Grachev. Since he made Gluf, we might as well all give up.

GA : Yes, he is a genius. I'm most impressed with his new one, Zak McDrucken. He hasn't used the Nirvana or other multi-colour engines. It's just simple regular colours, but brilliant, and so modern. I think he is a genius, really. I love his work. Even more than other greats like Zosya Entertainment. There's something about Denis that stands out. If I show this to my son, he thinks it's a PC game. It doesn't look like a Spectrum game.

Cubix is another recent game that I can show my son, and he doesn't believe it. Amazing, really.

BS : Perhaps if we'd seen these games in 1984, the Commodore guys would have been jealous.

GA : We didn't have the sensibility and taste back then. They can only happen now, in terms of graphics and design.

The thing that we couldn't get on the Spectrum too back then was the crazy concepts of the Japanese and American arcade games. There wasn't enough silliness - everything was trying to be serious. Games like Scuba Dive and TLL, which we loved, were all trying to be realistic. Maybe as you get old, you want something simple.

BS : You seem to have an aptitude for programming. Did you use any coding in your career?

GA : No. I tried to learn Python at one point, but I couldn't really understand how it works. I can really understand AGD and I went deep on that, but not regular languages. One thing I'm very proud of recently is Scramble in AGD, where I got scrolling working in an engine that wasn't really designed for that. I was very proud of that.

The program is so right for me. But in AGDx / AGDx mini you can do so much, including music and all these things, without having any real programming skills at all. That's me! Alan Turvey has done so much work there.

BS : Did you ever reach any limits of the engines where you had to ask for new features?

GA : No, There is so much potential in the tools. I never got to the end of them really. The language is open to your creativity. Jonathan Cauldwell has contributed so much.

BS : There are other engines, like ZXGM and Kwyll. Have you looked into those?

GA : Kwyll runs on the PC right? With my games I did all my work in an emulator, as if working on a Spectrum directly.

One thing that I would like to see from developers using tools like AGD, La Churrera, ZxGM: these fantastic tools can be used to create something other than the usual "collect this, jump there, avoid that enemy that only moves up-down or left-right". I just wish people would explore the possibilities more. I would love to see more discussion in the forums about how people found out new ways to use these tools. I think it would be very interesting

BS : Have all your games been free?

GA : Always. At one point, someone asked me if he could publish physical tapes, I said okay, I don't care. The only thing I want is that you send me a copy, and apart from that you can do what you like.

The only way I could make games was using tools that were free, so I would feel strange charging for the games. It's a hobby. I respect people who do charge, but it's not for me. It's a choice.

I wonder sometimes where teams get the time to make such high-quality games. People like Sanchez team, Pat Morita team. Zosya team. It's mysterious to me!

BS : We could ask how you found time to make 50 great games!

GA : Most of them are crap, really. Out of 50 games I made, maybe 10 are good.

BS : Maybe you need to make the 40 to build up to the 10?

GA : The time you spend to make a bad game is the same as you spend on a good game! I always said even in work that the time you spend on bad research is the same as you could spend on good research.

BS : Are there any particular favourites?

GA : Among those i made i particularly like the last ones made using AGDx-mini and AGDx (made by Allan Turvey): Pengo Mini, Bomber Pengo, Bomber Bot, Sheepish, Bubble Cop, Lunar patrol, Humans;

Also some earlier ones made with AGD: Castle Capers, Omelettes for Breakfast and Bubble Frenzy

I also like those i made using CGD (a tool developed by Dave Hughes): there are some good ideas there (Push'n 'Chase for example), but the games themselves are maybe too chaotic and difficult.

Humans, Lunar Patrol, Sheepish are, for very different reasons, my highs. In Humans I managed to re-create Lemmings (to some extent); in Lunar Patrol I devised this system of "embedding" the level map within the screen itself and in Sheepish I finally found the right way to represent my cartoon style and my humour!

BS : So, what now? What will you be spending your time on?

GA : I have to focus on my PhD. I'm doing now a 2nd PhD. When I was 26, I did my PhD in Biology, and now I'm working on a PhD related to my Mathematics teacher-training experience, so I need to focus on my thesis, and journal publications.

At this point I can say that I created enough games that are in line with my idea of what a game should be in terms of graphics, design, playability. I can go back and play those games once in a while. So I can say that now it is time to focus on more serious things.

BS : Are you happy to leave the Spectrum behind? Any regrets?

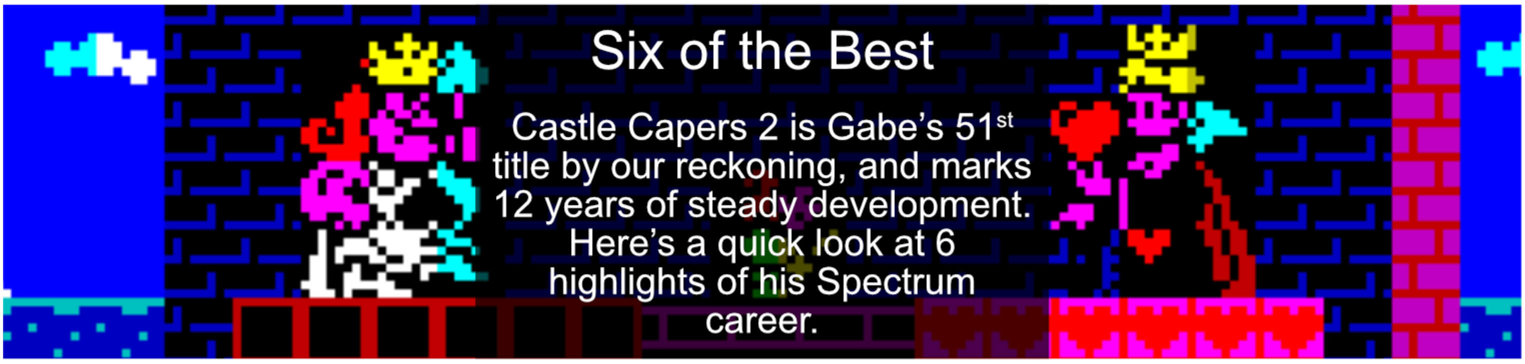
GA : I still have the forums, I'm not really leaving it behind. I just don't want to program again. It will take over! So no, no regrets.

I only don't understand sometimes when people in this community pick fights and arguments. We're all here to have a good time. There are many people that I've worked with and collaborated with.

I would just like to thanks everyone who helped me out so much, and encouraged me so much over the years. Paul Jenkinson, Jonathan Cauldwell, Dave Hughes, Allan Turvey, Alessandro Grussu, Sebastian Braunert, John Davies, Lee 'Chops' Stevenson, David Saphier, Lee Bee and Richard Langford and many others.

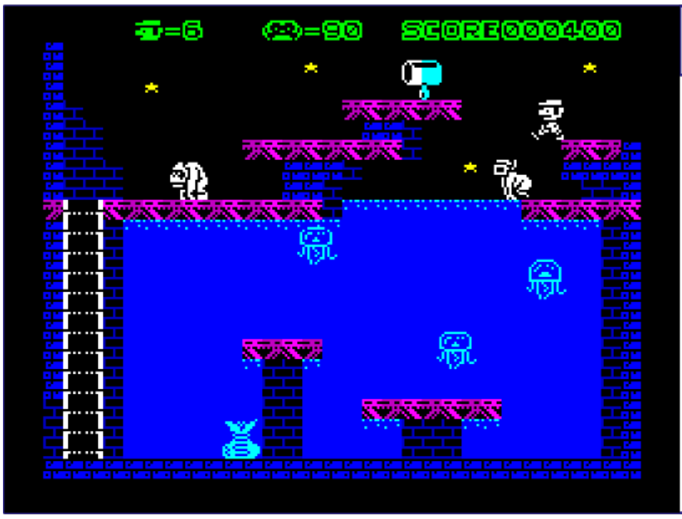
And so, all that remains is to thank Gabriele for granting us the interview, and for all the fantastic games he's released.

Good luck, and we'll see you on the forums



Six of the Best

Castle Capers 2 is Gabe's 51st title by our reckoning, and marks 12 years of steady development. Here's a quick look at 6 highlights of his Spectrum career.



Donkey Kong Reloaded (2013) AGD

Gabriele's first game, which he dismisses as 'awful' a few pages back, is a pretty standard but eminently playable platformer.

Graphically, it's Mario-themed, but with more standard mechanics. Barrels and turtles drop from the top of the screens in a Mario Bros / Donkey Kong style, but there the similarities end. Dodge the enemies, collect the cash, and explore the map. You do get to bash an ape with a hammer and rescue the princess though.

There's plenty of fun graphical flair too, like the scuba monkey pictured, and lovely smooth animations. An already impressive start.

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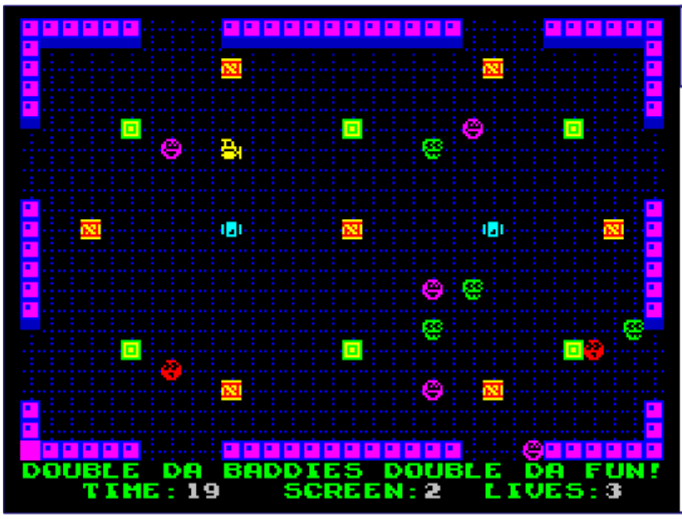

Push'n'Chase (2013) CGD

There are no animations to speak of in this character based action puzzler.

Driving your cute little yellow earthmover, you gotta push some blocks into the path of the marauding enemies while avoiding them and the other kind of blocks which they are pushing around.

It's frantic, original and good fun, but you'll really need to focus on this one. Those baddies are coming from all sides.

This does feature a level skip, like several of Gabe's games, so you never need to feel stuck.

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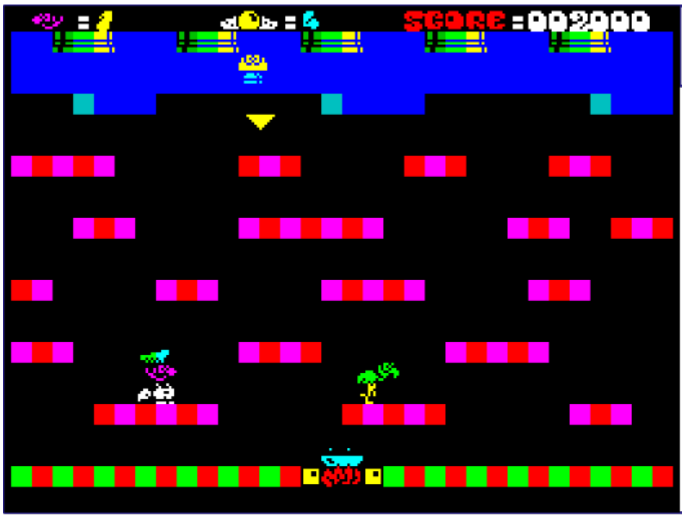


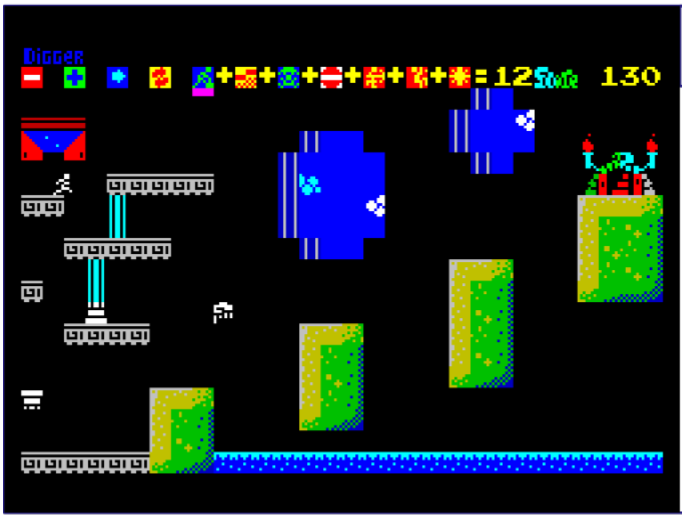
Omelettes for Breakfast (2017) AGD

Tough as aging bacon, this unique single-screen platformer has you, uh, choking your chicken to encourage it to lay eggs, which you can then pop into your frying pan.

But, naturally, not everything is so simple - you're being menaced by a salt-shaker looking thing that bounces around harmlessly until you're holding an egg, at which point it homes in on your position relentlessly.

There's some lovely animation in this one, as Gabriele's signature style establishes itself.

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/30413/ZX-Spectrum/Omelettes_For_Breakfast



The Humans (2021) AGDx Mini

We're back to single character graphics for this fantastically playable Lemmings game, developed with John Davies.

You've got 7 commands for your little guys. Digger, Ladder, Floater, Stopper, Pickaxe, Climber and the level-ending Suicide. Shifting the cursor control from mouse to regular keys/joystick works very well. There's some lively animation even in the 8x8 characters too, and the whole thing is visually clear.

This is a great achievement using the more advanced AGDx Mini, with the engine being pushed in unexpected directions.

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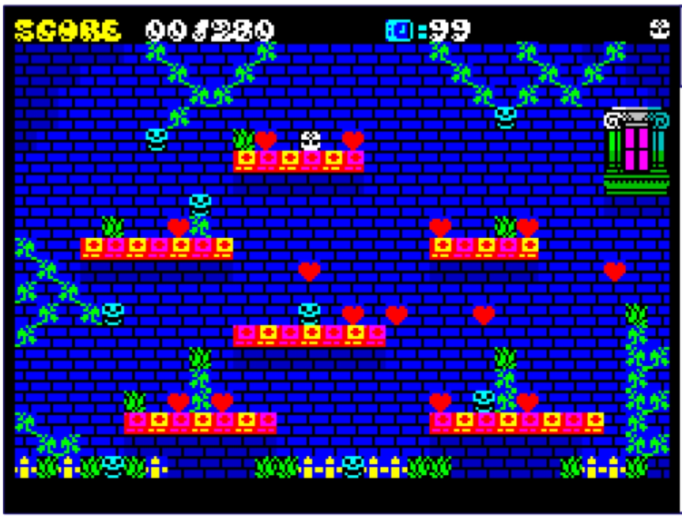
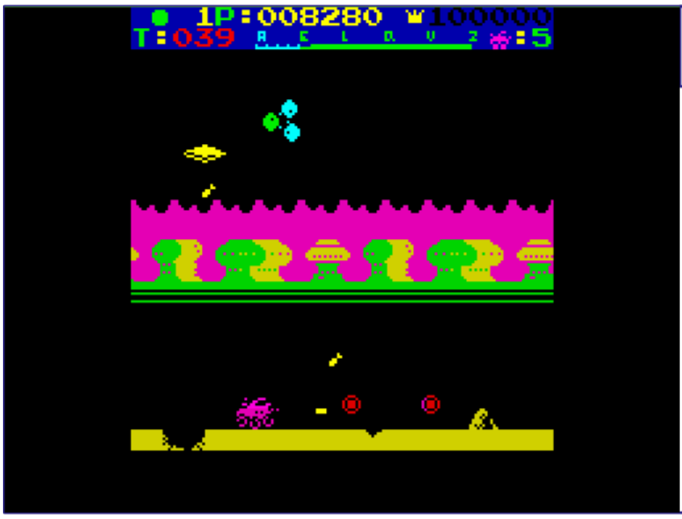


Bomber Pengo (2023) AGDx Mini

We weren't around in 2023, but this would have surely strolled to an Ace if we were. It's a devilishly difficult single-screener, with your penguin building his way to success by stacking bombs on top of each other, What could go wrong?

A finalist in the Spectrum Computing Game of the Year vote, this is seamlessly enjoyable, colourful and will have you chewing your controller.

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/39147/ZX-Spectrum/Bomber_Pengo



Lunar Patrol (2025) AGD

A recurring theme in Gabriele's games is that of making the engines do things that they weren't intended to do. Here, he's managed to get simple parallax scrolling working in AGD, which was designed with static single-screen platformers in mind.

All technical wizardry aside, this is a sound and playable Moon Patrol conversion, which we reviewed in full in Issue 1.

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44036/ZX-Spectrum/Lunar_Patrol

Travel Unlimited

Manu & Kit

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44497

Free

Back in 2019 Zosya blew us all away with a double whammy of breathtaking driving games, Drift & Just a Gal. They then surpassed the high bar they created by releasing further award-winning titles Travel Through Time in 2021 & Rubinho Cucaracha in 2022. These games have cemented their reputation for pushing the Speccy to its absolute limits and putting commercially released games like Out Run and Cisco Heat to shame with their silky smooth gameplay, high frame rates and compelling back stories played out in well animated cut scenes.

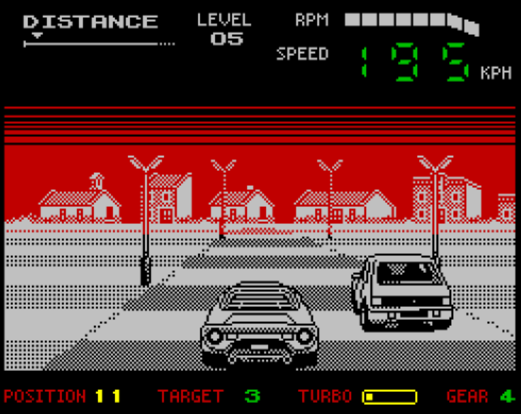
Manu & Kit are back for this year's Yandex competition with a brand new racer, Travel Unlimited, a spin off from the aforementioned Travel Through Time. This time around they have produced a straight up pure arcade racer with no back story.

Starting with perhaps the clearest synthesised speech ever heard on a ZX Spectrum. If you've played any of the previously mentioned games, you'll know what to expect. The graphics are superb and the racing is every bit as smooth as their previous titles.

It provides a stern challenge from the offset. If you go full pelt round every corner, you'll not even make it past the first stage, never mind the subsequent 59 that are on offer. To even out the toughness a little, you do get a slight nudge in your turbo boost bank for every dink your motor gets.

Although it's essentially a monochrome racer, there are a few splashes of colour here and there with different combinations to vary up the levels. Some of the levels are against the clock and some against AI opponents, there are point to point levels, circuits and rallies. The better you perform in each stage, the more cash you earn to soup up your car with various upgrades and you'll certainly need them to make any headway in this huge game.

The graphics are extremely detailed, with gorgeous scenery that licks by at quite the pace. It has a sense of speed you all too rarely got on the Speccy in its heyday. It even has undulating roads, which are particularly noticeable on the rally levels.



Into the Stratos-phere

The only real downside, other than its toughness which may put some off, is the lack of variety. Although the different types of stages vary it up a bit, they do generally feel quite similar and I miss the story element of their previous games.

Overall though it's a stunning racer, which is pretty much par for the course from these established devs. As Rihanna would say, baby you got the keys now shut up and drive, drive, drive, drive!

See, I would have liked nothing more than to drive, drive, drive, drive, but I couldn't see the corners coming.

The technical prowess here was immediately obvious, with smooth and fast movement, and responsive controls. The cars look great, and the different race types are appreciated. The voice effects are Nancy-at-Chase-HQ levels of crispness. All marvellous.

At my first attempts though, it seemed that you can't see where you're going. At full speed, the first indication that I needed to turn was often the crunching noise as I hit a lamppost - not ideal. The turns just appeared out of nowhere, as if the car was constantly cresting a hill.

I forced my way though the first few levels via trial and error, memorising the turns. Perhaps, I thought, I could convince this guy sat next to me on the train to take notes on each track, and yell them at me, rally-style, as I try to complete each level.

But then, something clicked. There is, I noticed finally, a visual clue on the horizon that warns you about upcoming corners. I'd been focusing on my car, foolishly. Once I had that sussed, it all changed. Suddenly, I was the reincarnation of Timo Mäkinen, whipping around corners, zooming past rivals with my eyes fixed on the distant road ahead. The races flew past in a blur. I reluctantly traded in my cool Lancia for a boring Porsche, and eventually an absurd Lamborghini. The speeds increased noticably as I upgraded the cars through the levels, but no matter. I was the embodiment of velocity itself, right up until the end.

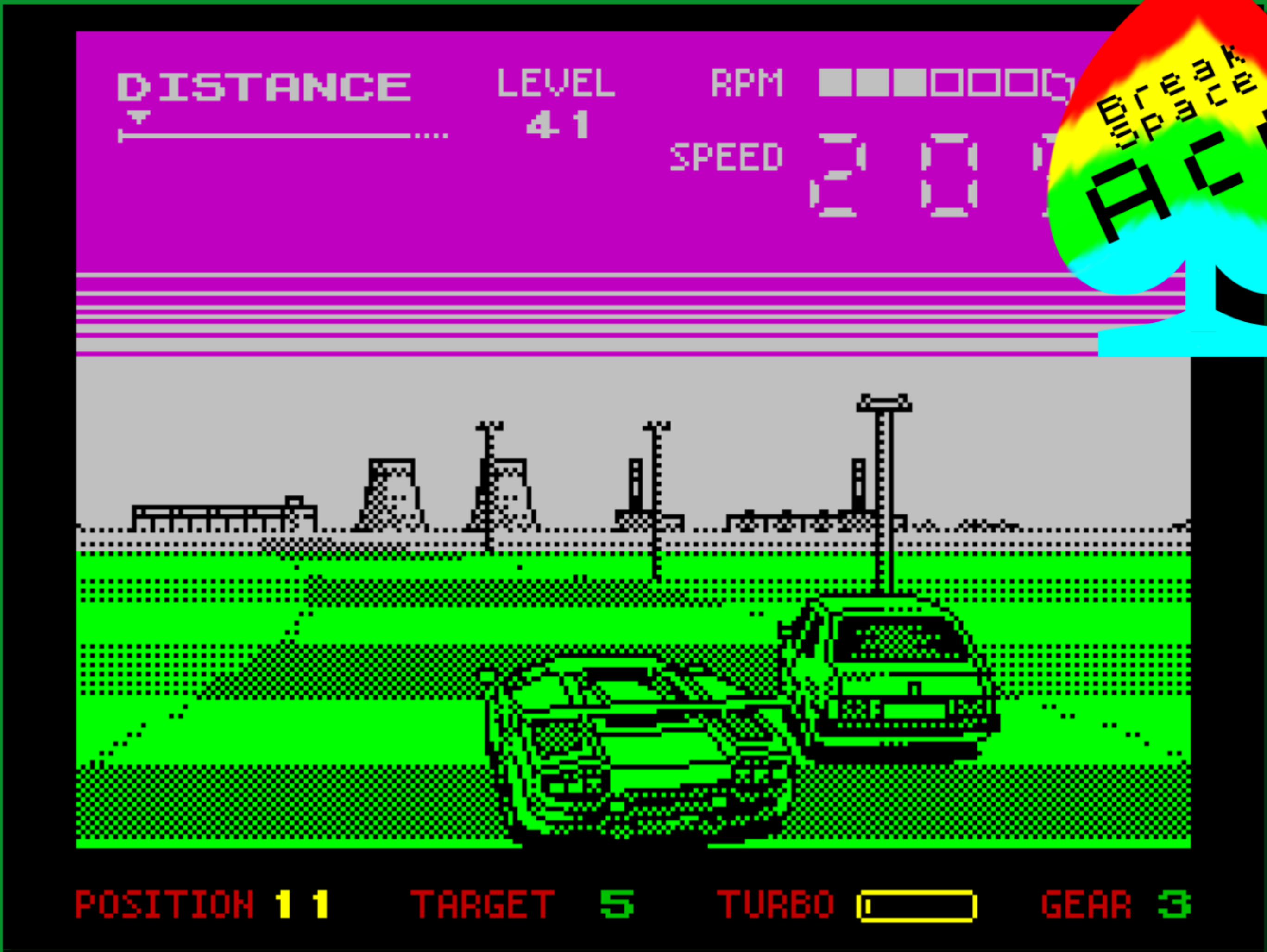
I could maybe argue that the 60 levels get a little repetitive, despite the varying colouring and backdrops. It lacks the story elements of its predecessors, too, which lessens its unique personality. But these are not roadblocks to the game's success. This is a technical masterclass, with enough gameplay variety to hold your attention. If you want to drive fast cars on the Spectrum, this is as good as it gets.

If I drove my car like I try to drive in racing games, I would floor the accelerator the second the engine started and not remove my right foot from that position until I'd arrived at my destination.

Maybe this is why I have never been very good at racing games. The first one I played was Chase HQ. I loved that game, which really shone on the Spectrum. Travel Unlimited also shines. For an arcade racing game on the Spectrum, it's fast, fluid and full of fun. One design choice that is particularly good is the dithered road surface that makes the non-dithered cars really stand out. A great trick when the colours are so limited.

The game is excellent. The super smooth, high detailed animations of the cars is yet another treat in this tour de force of a game . The only thing that lets it down is that hitting the turbo button should give you that ZOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM! feeling, and honestly, the turbo in this game feels a little underwhelming.

Man, I'm being picky. Travel Unlimited is an exceptional achievement, a real treat, and a must-play game for Speccy fans. I just need to learn to brake, and maybe I'll make it a little further into the game!



On your left!

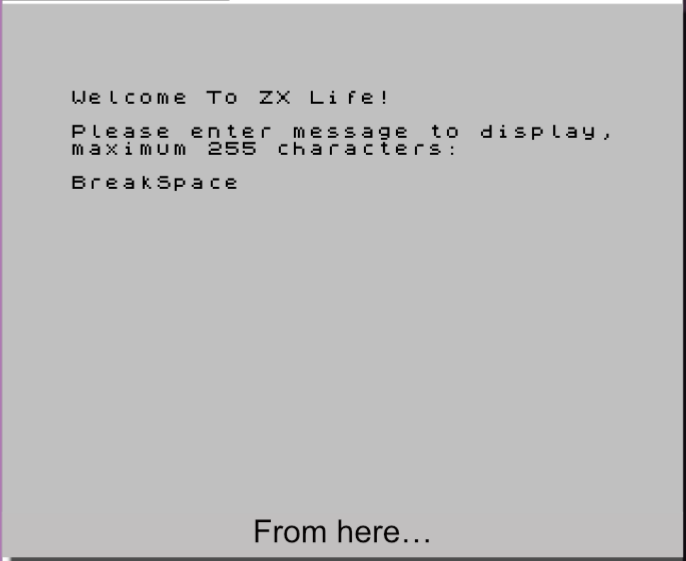
ZX Life

Ambient Coder

https://ambientcoder.itch.io/zx-life-2

Free

I'm a pretty lazy guy, let's face it, so I snapped up the chance to review a zero-player game. Think of all the time I've saved not playing the game – time I can pour into this review!



```
Welcome To ZX Life!

Please enter message to display,
maximum 255 characters:

BreakSpace
```

From here…

You likely know Conway's Game of Life – that mesmerizing grid where simple rules birth complex chaos from live and dead cells. If not, the gist is: set an initial pattern, then watch it evolve automatically. Live cells survive with 2 or 3 neighbors; dead ones spring to life with exactly 3. Too few neighbors? Loneliness kills. Too many? Overcrowding does the job. Simple rules, astonishingly complex results

The presentation handles this quite nicely, using colorful 4x4 squares on a white background. As the game plays out, the phrase "hello world" appears letter by letter. These letters then spawn more patterns. I like how it takes the idea of a simple first program ("hello world") and turns it into something far more interesting.

Both Conway's Game of Life and "hello world" play with the idea of computers simulating life. After all, it's not "hello computer"! Here, "hello world" literally evolves into Life patterns. Smart. Very artful.

Of course, the humble Spectrum struggles as the game size increases. But that's hardly an issue – watching the computer run its calculations in slower motion is part of the fascination of old machines. You can see everything, know everything, control everything. You're set free by the hardware limitations in a way not possible on today's powerhouse computers.

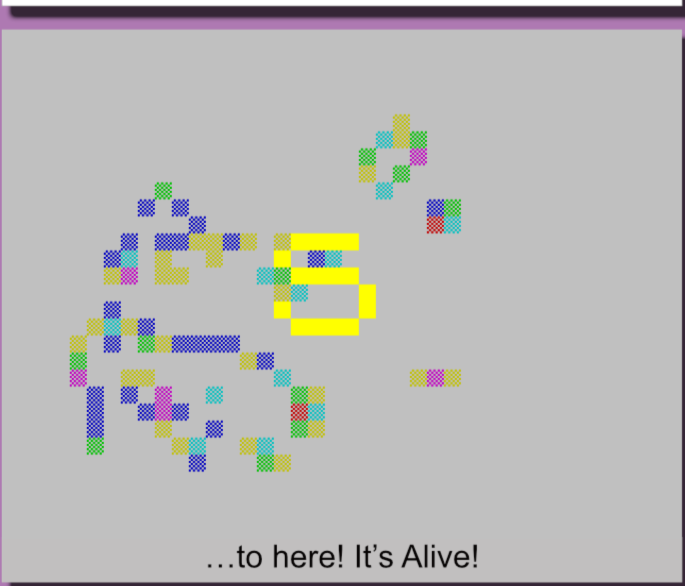
So, freed from the burden of gameplay, this review became an unexpected exercise in mindfulness. It's an artful, thought-provoking piece. Zero-player game? Yeah. Turns out, doing nothing can be profoundly zen.

Developed in 1970 by the late John Horton Conway, a noted Liverpudlian and Mathetician, the Game of Life cellular automation simulation is known as a "zero player" game, and yet this implies no user input, and therefore this variant, developed and published by Ambient Coder, has a small twist. Yes, you, dear reader, are expected to contribute some effort, which involves at least two key presses to begin (after loading, by the way).

The two key presses worth of effort involves typing in at least one character, and then pressing ENTER; note here that not everything available on the keyboard will generate a result. For instance, ZX Life seems unable to decode graphical characters, and some keywords that are available, like PI, OR and STOP, are not used either. Spaces also become underscores. You may enter up to 255 letters, numbers and symbols. Once ENTER is pressed, the game proper begins. Now you can sit back and enjoy the life that you have created, in full colour and even with border flashes too.

It's fun to see your words virtually sparking to life in this simulation.

ZX Life will run for as long as you keep your Spectrum powered, and the programme running. So, it's one of the few releases in which you have essentially unlimited lives (no POKEs necessary), as it'll loop through your entered random characters again once it is done, always renewing the playfield with more life. Enjoy the patterns of your own creation, whilst listening to some progressive music like Pink Floyd, The Mars Volta, or something. My only regret is that there isn't a restart without resetting your computer, but this is a minor detail in an otherwise worthwhile release.



…to here! It's Alive!

Another Golf

Raimis001

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44427

PWYW / $2

A par loading screen

Another Golf, aka Golf 2026, has simplified golfing into the old Speccy so that you only have to remember some rules about club selection and that's it. There are no variables to consider such as wind direction, and no plush 3D map is presented like the US Gold classic Leaderboard. This is cost-reduced golf in 2D only.

To be honest, everything - and I mean everything - I know about the sport of Golf is from the aforementioned US Gold game; watching it on the television seems like you're just looking at a lot of televised sky, and it seems to be one of those boring sports that's only ever good on a computer, with precise timing and mental gymnastics to work out how you're going to get your pixelated golf ball from one part of the virtual play area to another. Club selection is key in all binary golfing, and especially so in this simplified iteration.

It's very simple, you are given information of how far you are away from the hole, and a par for the course. Choose your club and select the power of your shot based on your selection. Note that there is also no way to undo any mistakes: once you've selected your club, and power to put into the shot, you are unable to go back. I've accidentally selected the putter all too often at this point. I note also that it does not state whether the clubs are for left- or right-handed players though, but with all of the other missing elements from the simulation, I'm probably just being pedantic here.

I do find the lack of a two or more player option somewhat disappointing, as I reckon adding in some competitiveness would do this game good. Otherwise, it's up to you to ace each course with various Birds and Eagles or something.

Other than that, it does everything that you'd want, if you're happy with fairly rudimentary graphics and sparse sound with a limited play mechanic. But there's still a game here, again one that I could imagine trying to create myself in BASIC in years past.

Another Golf is a programming exercise inspired by Andy Haslam's ZX80 'GOLF 2024', so it's simple stuff. I hasten to say BASIC. Boriel BASIC.

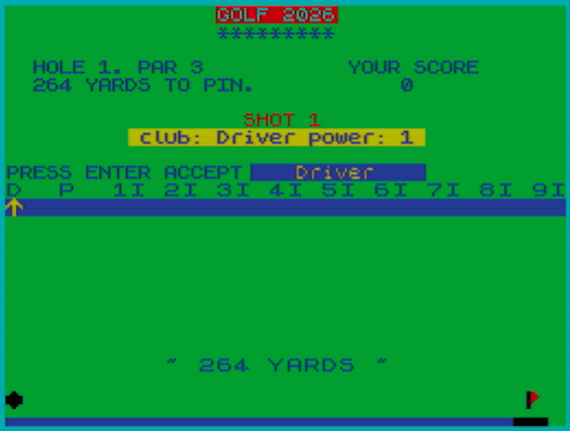
The game gives you a 2D green, a distance to the pin, a good selection of clubs, a power 1-10 to hit with, and then you watch the ball clunk along to the target. There's no rough, no bunkers, no direction, no wind, and no rotund caddy giving you unwanted opinions (yes Nick Faldo Plays The Open I'm looking at you).

But the physics work, more or less. For example, if you want to take a maverick approach and tee off with a putter, even at maximum power the ball only travels about fifty yards. It just doesn't show the dumbstruck crowd dressed in salmon-pink wondering how the hell you got a membership.

I'm not entirely sure why it's also known as "GOLF 2026". I think we can assume it's not the year it was coded, so this must be a futuristic version of the sport. I would have expected more body armour and punk haircuts, but it goes to show what a traditional game golf is I suppose.

Another Golf was never intended to be the next Leaderboard. It's a bit of fun for the author, and us players to muck about with. We can test its limits, find its flaws, and think about how we could refine our own golf game (A task that should be on everyone's bucket list).

(Boriel BASIC source available at https://github.com/raimis001/ZXGolf/blob/main/golf.bas - Ed)



```
                    GOLF 2026
                    *********

  HOLE 1. PAR 3                 YOUR SCORE
  264 YARDS TO PIN.                 0

                     SHOT 1
            club: Driver power: 1

PRESS ENTER ACCEPT       Driver
D   P   1I  2I  3I  4I  5I  6I  7I  8I  9I
↑



                ~  264 YARDS  ~
```

Now watch this drive.

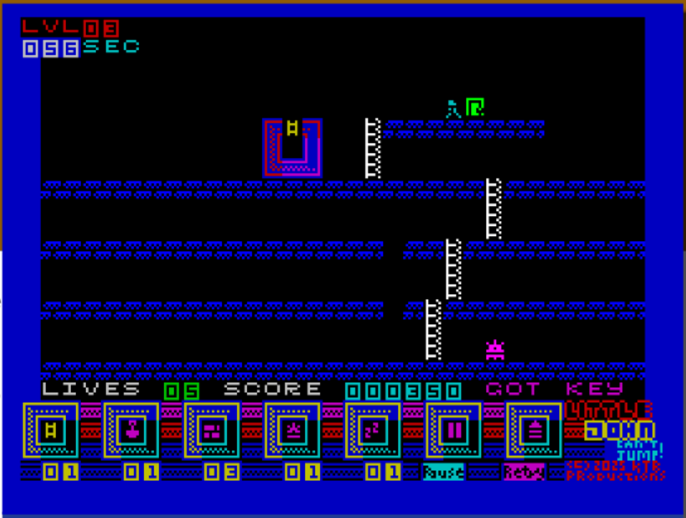
Little John Can't Jump

KTB Retro Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44471

PWYW / $2

I've waxed lyrical about io.rrw/KTB Retro Computing's games on these pages before. I've really enjoyed their quirky "Throbby" platformers and Painter Man so when I saw this latest game I was keen to give it a bash.



What's behind the green door? (an old piano, hotly played)

The plot itself appears to revolve around someone whose name is John, who is little and unable to jump. It might not sound like much of a plot but it's deeper than some Spectrum games, take "the Shaky Game" for example where you have to get to a house & avoid a bat biting you.

Welsh Elvis inspired non sequitur aside, I fired it up ready for some platforming action. My first thought was, "why can't I move the little man…why can't I move the little man??" It turns out you don't move the little man but rather control the environment around him like some sort of side on god, Lemmings style. So what I thought was going to be a fun platformer turns out to be a fun puzzler. Life is full of surprises and I do love puzzle games.

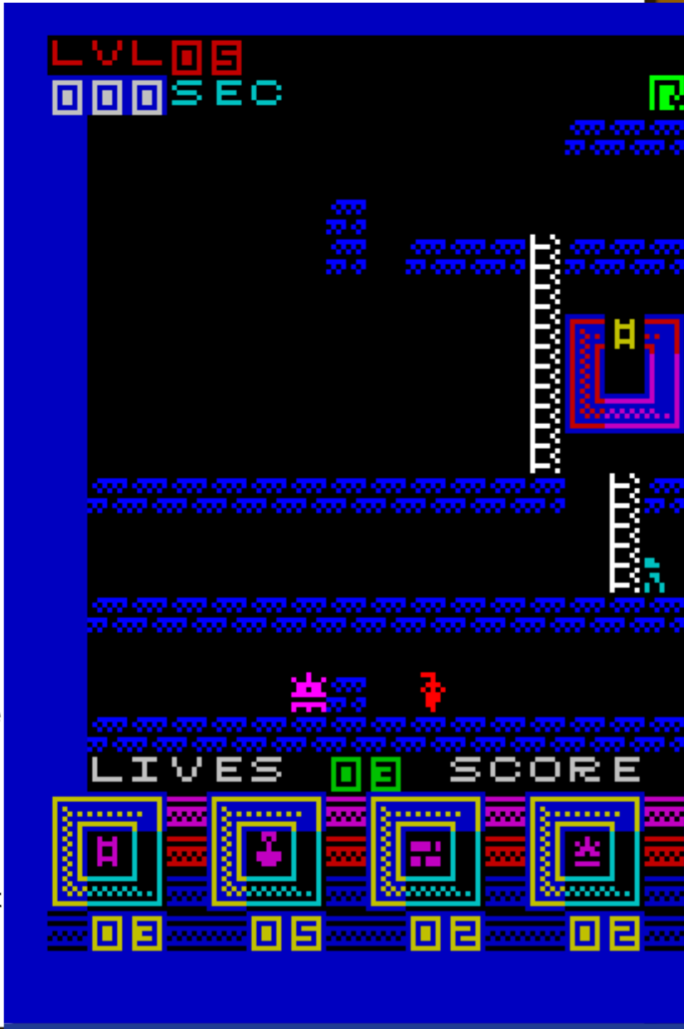
The goal is to get John to grab a key and escape through the green door (oooh the green door…seems like this game has more to do with Shakin' Stevens than the Shaky game does!). Although John can't jump, he can run from left to right and this he'll keep doing until the end of time unless you intervene in some way by placing a ladder, digging a hole, filling a hole, or setting a mine. As with most sensibly designed games it starts off very simply to get you used to what's going on, but the challenge soon ramps up as you progress, adding in baddies and landmines as you work your way through the levels.

It quickly becomes super frantic trying to keep tabs on guiding the little fella between the levels and avoiding the nasties. No sooner have you planned out your strategy than events take over and little John is running blindly into big danger. Thankfully the dev has been thoughtful enough to add in a number of difficulty levels, where you can opt to play the game with events unfolding at a more sedate pace.

If you use the joystick you need to combine it with the space bar (or Break Space*) to swap between items, which can prove tricky. When I was playing on the keys, my "old man brain" kept getting confused between the Select & Use keys, and it does have you pining for a mouse control like Lemmings on the Amiga.

That's my only real quibble. The game is well designed and gives the old noggin a bit of a workout as well as the reflexes. It looks good too, there's some clever stuff going on with the menu and they somehow squeeze quite a bit of character out of a protagonist that's only a few pixels high.

The Itch page teases us that this is a prequel to an as yet unreleased game called John Can't Jump. It certainly whets the appetite for the next game. I'm expecting big things.



This ol' house she r

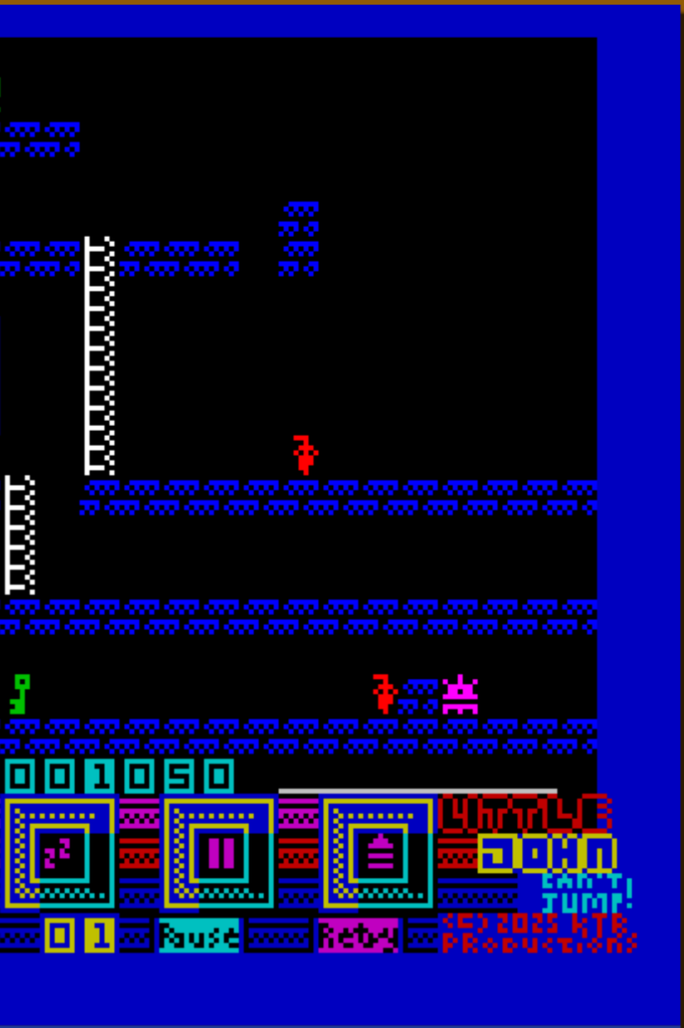
Another day, another puzzle game for the old Speccy, and blim! This one's a good 'un, but for any of you aging gamers out there (and, let's face it, you're reading a Spectrum 'zine, so I'm going to assume that you are) I'd recommend this one be played on a decent sized screen. Whilst the standard Omni screen is sufficient, playing this reminded me that I need to book an eye test. Right, so what's it all about then?

Little John is roughly the size of a standard Speccy character, and so are any roaming antagonists or other hazards found in this neat production. Each level is comprised of a single screen with some nicely pixelated but rudimentary scenery. It has a wrap-around thingy going on, so if LJ or any other animate object within goes off one side of the screen, he (or they) will appear on the other. The simple object is to nab the key and get to the exit, but as the name suggests, there is no jumping mechanic to rely upon. This is where you come in; you must guide our little hero to meet said objectives.

How do ya do that then? Simple, you can add to, or remove from the level designs. You have ladders, to help LJ move up to the next platform, a spade, to dig through the floor and therefore drop to the platform below, bricks to create a barrier so that LJ changes direction, some sort of sleeping thing, which will let our hero have a quick snooze (good for slowing him down to avoid roamers), and a land mine, to deal with those nasties. Note that these will also affect your foes too, careful placement and timing is key, especially as the levels become more complex and challenging.

There is no time limit, and if you want a nice sedate pace, I recommend that you set LJ's walking speed to slowest before you start. Although his fastest pace isn't exactly completely manic, it makes timing more difficult, especially for tight spots that require some accurate action.

The presentation is nice, and I have to say, had this been released in the 1980s, it would have been gushed over for its thoughtful design, puzzling fun and sheer cuteness. Those qualities shine through today; it's clever, engaging and scores high on the playability front. It's a delightful blend of strategy and charm, demanding just enough brainpower to keep you hooked without overwhelming your retro reflexes too much too quickly. Which is nice.



needs more ladders

"Hey man, get off my case!" I couldn't dig up any background info on the main character in this game, but judging by the way he talks, I don't think he's Robin Hood's mate. Rather, he seems to be a 1960's beatnik, lost in a series of levels where he has to find a key and enter a green door. I've no idea what he's searching for behind the green door—but I do know my '60s pop culture, and let's just say this Little John is a very naughty boy! Still, who am I to judge? On with the review!

Little John can't Jump is a sort of cross between Lode Runner and Lemmings, and just the sort of puzzler I love. The game starts easy so you can get into the swing of things and learn the mechanics. But before you know it, everything turns really frantic as you try to guide Little John to the exit, avoiding all sorts of nasties and pitfalls along the way.

The icons can be a little fiddly. At first I thought the game suffered from crippling slowdown - but it turned out I was clicking the pause button instead of the ladder icon.

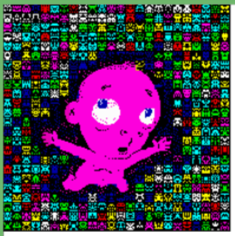
I don't recommend playing with a joystick - there doesn't seem to be a button assigned to swap icons, so I had to revert to the keyboard. Luckily, you can define your own keys. But, not unlike Sloany's old man brain, it was my old-man-arthritic-fingers which eventually gave out, as I struggled to find the right keys during the game's more hectic moments. Controls aside, this game is very promising, and If this is the prequel I can't wait for the next game - but please fix the Kempston controls!

Runaway Nose

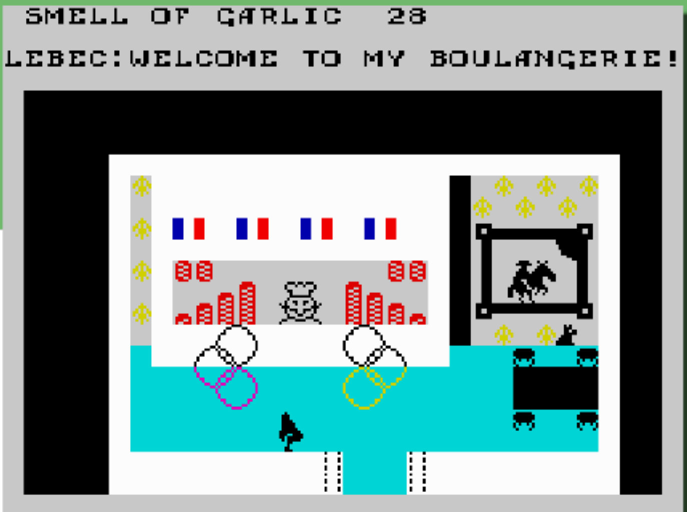
Chentzilla

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44495

Free



Come, Tovarisch, leave your felt boots by the door and take a seat by the fire. Where we will have a warming stakan of black tea and regale each other with quotes from Chekov. Then we will play ZX-Spectrum, listen to hardbass, and drink vodka until we feel strong enough to wrestle a bear.



SMELL OF GARLIC 28

LEBEC:WELCOME TO MY BOULANGERIE!

Smells better than Subway

Now, it’s possible that I have a romanticised view of Old Russia, but that’s why I loved Runaway Nose so much. It’s a celebration of some old greats of literature that epitomise ‘The Russian Soul’, with nods to Pushkin, Alexei Tolstoy, and most of all, it’s coded in the style of my favourite absurdist—Nikolai Gogol.

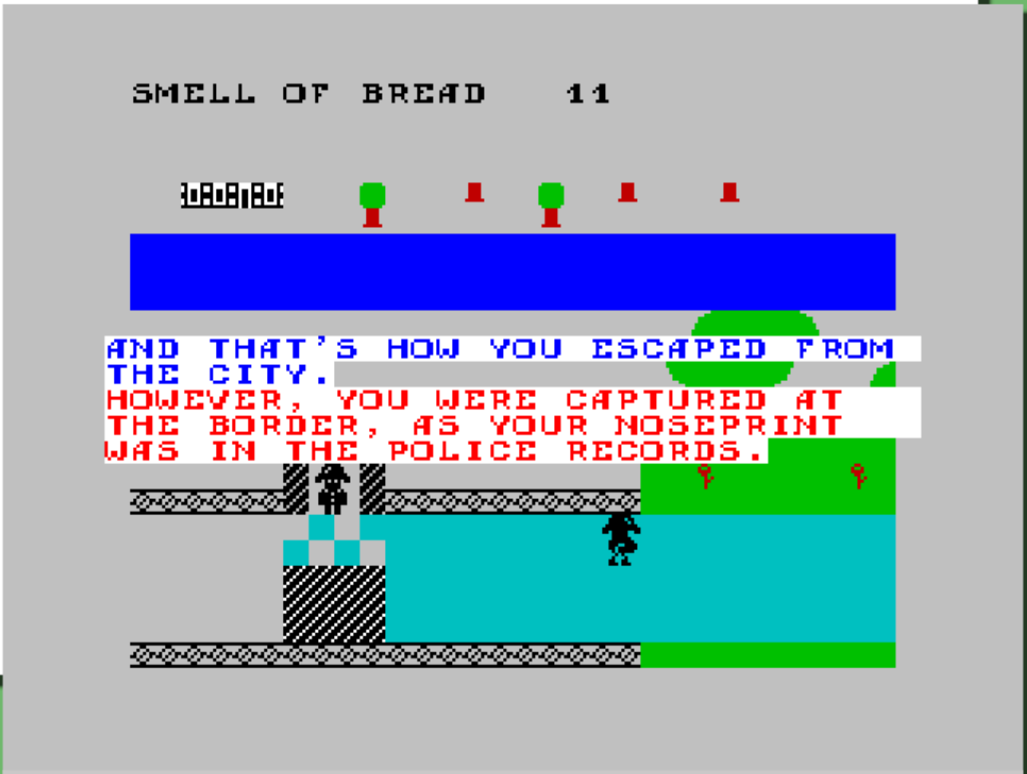
This game is inspired by Gogol’s short story ‘The Nose’, which is the everyday tale of a man’s nose disappearing, reappearing inside a loaf of bread, and later being spotted masquerading as a State Councillor. In spirit, it reminds me of Alessandro Grussu’s ZX masterpiece ‘Cronopios Y Famas’, which is also based on a book and makes the player unquestioningly surrender to the rules of a bizarre world.

After you’ve redefined the keys (the defaults are QAOPI… so close!), you play this errant Nose, beginning by escaping the man’s face and then you wander around collecting smells, which you need to use elsewhere to influence events. For example, you inhale the smell of a dog, and exhale it onto a cat to make it scarper. These smells can only be held for thirty seconds, so you need to plan your routes and avoid picking up other smells along the way.

This is an action/adventure game with the emphasis on adventure. The main hazard is being arrested by the ever-vigilant policemen, who sprint in your direction the moment they see you. While not fatal, you do spend a night in the cells and get a criminal record. There are ways to die, but as special events that mark the many alternative endings the game has.

And that’s the thing—there isn’t really a single objective to the game. There are many possible outcomes, some more prosperous than others, and some more preposterous than others. I think that’s why Runaway Nose captures the spirit of Gogol’s story so well: both are half-crazed adventures with no specific purpose that reflect their period and place.

Being familiar with the story will boost your enjoyment, otherwise the graphical quirkiness may feel less charming and the eccentricity of the puzzles could be mistaken for disorganisation. Runaway Nose was first published as an entry to the Yandex Retro Games Battle, a competition it is not going to win, but it certainly gets appreciation from me, and surely Gogol himself if he was still around.



SMELL OF BREAD 11

AND THAT'S HOW YOU ESCAPED FROM THE CITY.
HOWEVER, YOU WERE CAPTURED AT THE BORDER, AS YOUR NOSEPRINT WAS IN THE POLICE RECORDS.

So close, and yet…

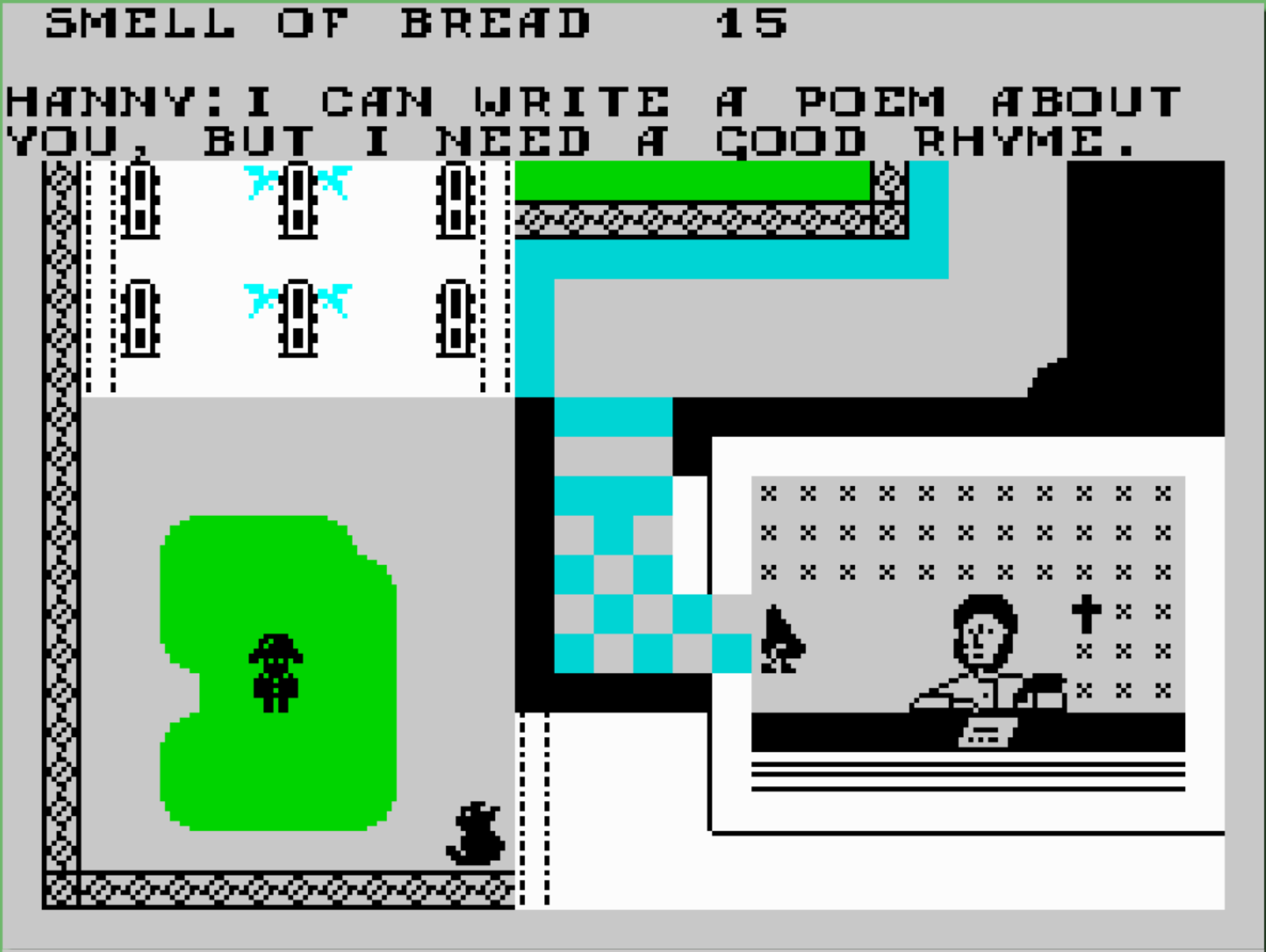
I’m reviewing this immediately after returning from the Edinburgh Fringe, where a show about a runaway nose wouldn’t even register as unusual. But in the world of Spectrum games at least, it’s nice to get a fresh new premise.

A few notes first on how the game works - you, as the fugitive nose, walk about a top-down flip-screen town, starting off with no particular goal.

You need to time your passage past the guards, who turn steadily clockwise like The Sentinel and run at you if you’re in their narrow field of view. It’s possible, and sometimes necessary, to lure them by dodging in and out of their way, but they do move awfully fast. A single touch from them lands you in the gaol, which you’ll likely find frustrating initially. The sometimes unforgiving mechanics seem at odds with the freewheeling absurdist plot, but can be mastered quickly enough.

As a nose, you naturally solve puzzles by inhaling odours which you can hold for 30 seconds and expel to influence characters you meet along the way. None of the puzzles are especially challenging, but they are witty and pleasantly light-hearted.

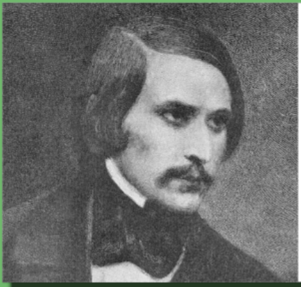
Exploration is fun here, with unexpected situations keeping things fresh through the rather short play time. Multiple endings and goals will encourage replays and it’s a charming, wry, unique experience.



SMELL OF BREAD 15

HANNY:I CAN WRITE A POEM ABOUT YOU, BUT I NEED A GOOD RHYME.

A nose by any other name…



Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol (pictured here keeping a close eye on his nose) never saw a computer, having died in 1852. Nevertheless, we are confident that he would have enjoyed the Wally Week games. Perhaps Monty Mole would have inspired some sympathy as well.

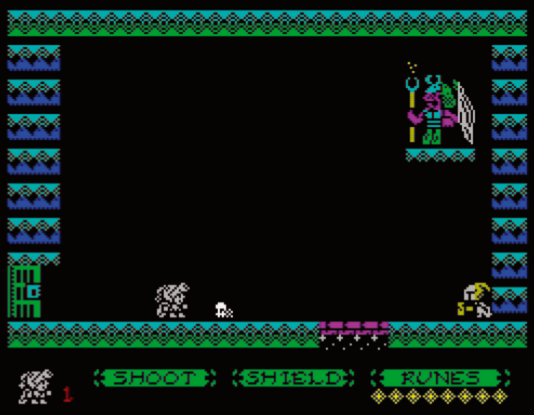
Sadly, we will never know.

Hammer Knight

Hicks

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44576

PWYW / £2



Nice wings, weirdo.

Hammer Knight is set in the days of old when knights were bold and apparently carried around whopping great hammers that they hoyed at their enemies. The game sees you taking on the role of one of these said knights by the name of Tharion, who has been tasked with restoring order to a chaotic world by retrieving the “Relic of Thunder” from a naughty winged demon.

With the McGuffin in place your quest kicks off with a bit of “Hicks Presents” synthesised speech which, much like “Seeega” or “E.A. Sports itinzagame” intros of the 90s, reassures you that you are in for some quality gaming time.

Hammer Knight is the sort of flipscreen platforming caper that Hicks does so well, with scenery to demolish, baddies to be vanquished or avoided and doors to unlock. There's a hammer ‘throwing and retrieving’ mechanic that's a little tricky to get to grips with at times but is jolly clever and brings a bit more strategy into play than just blindly firing weapons at the nasties. I particularly like the way when you enter a new screen hammerless, your trusty tool (ooh-er) floats in a bubble which you must catch and pop to reclaim, Bubble Bobble style.

The game does involve a bit of trial and error, or in my case error and error, and initially having just the 5 paltry lives on offer feels quite stingy. This does however mean you get plenty of chances to view a brutal game over screen, so graphic that if it’d been published in Your Sinclair it would've had parents insist it be shifted to the top shelves with the grubby mags.

When you get into the gameplay and figure out enemy patterns and characteristics (such as the dive-bombing bats and the little slimeball that steals your hammer) progress is satisfying. The levels are extremely well designed and neat graphics and music round out the package, giving the whole thing the feel of a full price release.

For replay value it even has what I consider to be a very modern* trait of having a “bad ending” if you don't gather the prerequisite number of shiny things. Once again Hicks has nailed it, but you don't need me to hammer it home, give it a bash yourself.

*Cue readers pointing out this sort of thing was happening on games played on Babbage's Difference Engine or something.

I do like a game that makes me think, but when I find a thinking game, it’s usually a puzzler, not an arcade adventure. What’s got the grey matter going with Hammer Knight is the control scheme. Unlike most similar Speccy games, there are two action buttons: one to jump, one to throw your trusty hammer. Pushing up is for aiming, which took some getting used to. As a creature of habit, I kept pushing up at the wrong moments hoping to jump. It took a while to rewire my brain. But I got there, enough to complete it, making two completed this issue (not such a dud now, eh, Ed?). And though I enjoyed it a lot, I won’t forgive it for lodging the 1990 hit “U Can’t Touch This!” in my head.

Other than that McHammer earworm, and the odd stuck spot if you’ve only got one hammer and it lands somewhere not retrievable, I like how it keeps me thinking. The hammer’s no “kill all” tool; it damages, clears paths, but has limits, so you’re forced to strategise. As a spritely knight, you jump to dodge roamers and navigate platforms. Your armoury includes a protective shield, good for three hits and replaceable only in select map spots. It guards against one circumstance that you’ll figure out.

As the world opened up, Hammer Knight kept surprising and delighting; my brain eased into this 2D Speccy platformer’s two-button, directional-throw thingy.

Overall, it’s a borderline Ace, tiptoeing a fine line: great presentation, sweet musical scores, a pleasing “whoop” jump sound, and graphical niceties with smart attribute management to dodge too many colour clashes. Sharp reactions help in places (especially the end boss battle), and completion yields a nice, funny surprise. It’s worth a replay or two, the true sign of a good game’s sign, so I’m on the fence for full ACEness. I’ll let my esteemed colleagues decide. But it’s all rather splendid: highly recommended for your collection.

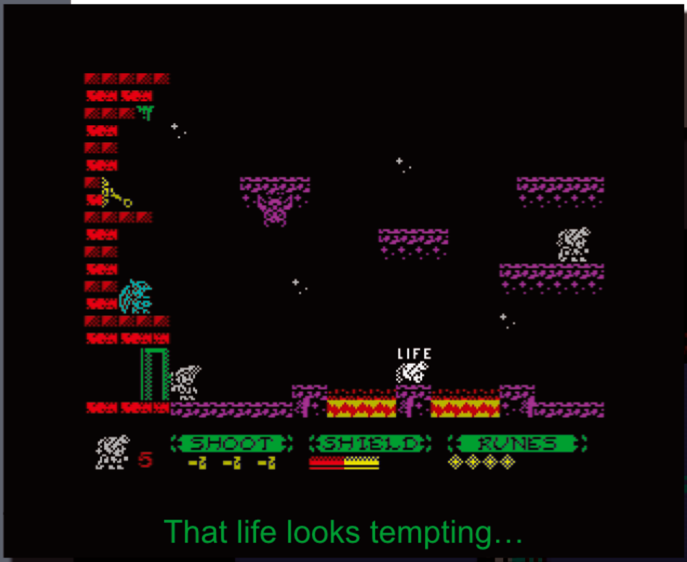
Take a gander at the main character in this game. What a cute chap! Just the sort of rascal you'd expect to find happily leaping around on rainbows and collecting cherries — not hurling hammers in people's faces! Why a hammer? Isn't a mighty broadsword aggressive enough to satisfy his bloodlust?

I suppose a hammer makes for a lighter, more mobile weapon of choice, especially when one has to leap from platform to platform. Still, it does come with a slight drawback: you have to retrieve it after every throw. And if your hammer happens to tumble into molten lava, well — tough bananas — you'll just have to do without!

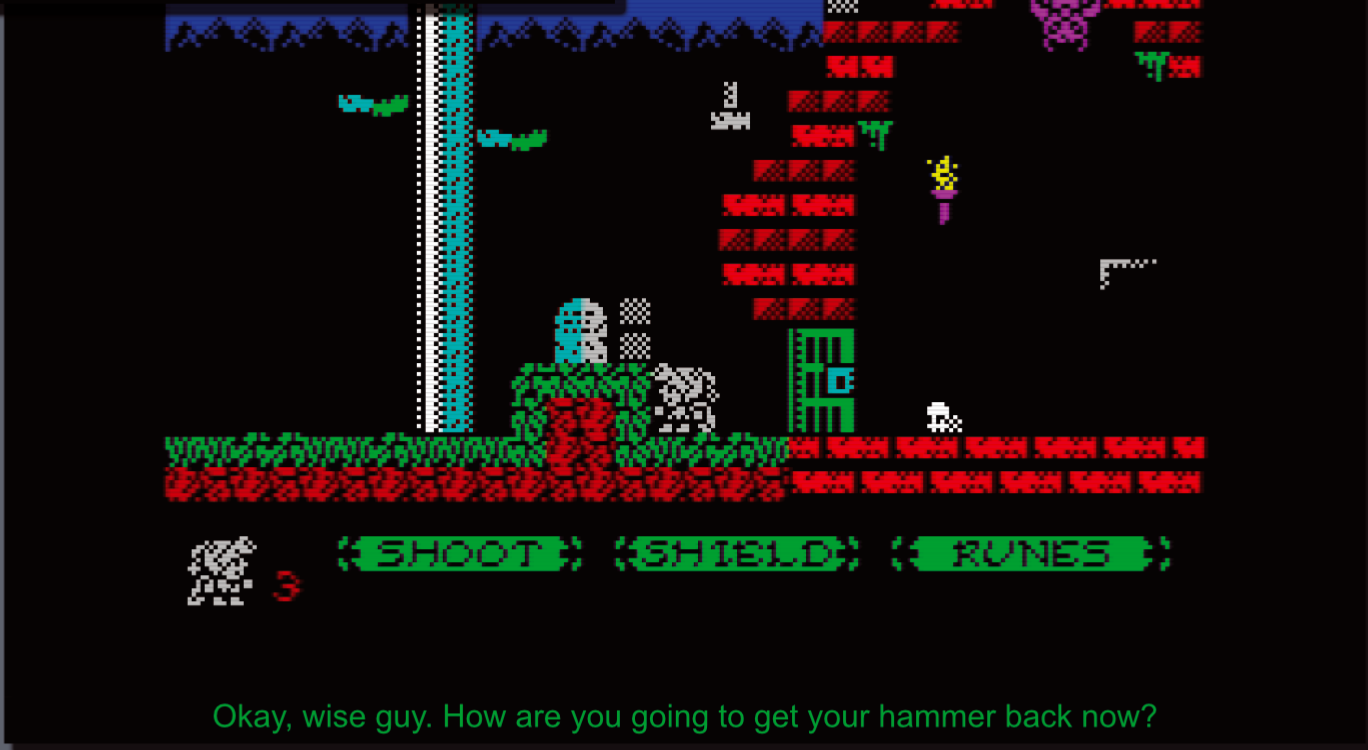
You are also equipped with a shield, which comes in rather handy as it deflects enemy projectiles, sending them coursing right back to where they came from — killing the same enemy who launched them. Instant Karma!

I really enjoyed this platformer — exploring the world as it gradually unfolds, collecting runes, and avoiding sudden bat attacks. It's extremely well made, and honestly plays more like a NES game than a Speccy one! The difficulty is pitched just right — which is no small feat these days. If I died, I had only myself to blame. But I'd dive straight back in, pick up my gore-drenched hammer, and have another bash.

After a challenging boss battle, I finally managed to complete it (it's the sort of game that makes you determined to see it through). Sadly, I got the "BAD" ending — turns out I didn't collect enough totems. A good excuse to have another go! Highly recommended!



That life looks tempting…



Okay, wise guy. How are you going to get your hammer back now?

I Bought 130 Random Spectrum Games...

and why you should too.

Grace E. tells us about how she lost the run of herself, but doesn't regret it somehow.

"Just one, perhaps two."

That was my thought process back in late April. By August, on what felt like the hottest dayof the year so far, I found myself with cassettes lining the floor, wall to wall, a can of overly sweet, caffeinated drink in a lurid pink tin in hand, and Boney M playing cheerfully in the background.

SPECTRUM GAMES COMPILATI
TAPE 10
362

How had I ended up with a box full of Speccy games in the first place?

I had got myself into this predicament through a semi-convoluted series of events, as usual, which eventually culminated in Facebook Marketplace's algorithm realising that I had officially reached a point of no return, and that I was definitely likely to purchase more than just one or two.
In fact, it had decided that I was very likely to be interested in one hundred and thirty cassettes. No cases. Untested. Yes, but all for under twenty quid. I am not one to be easily swayed by algorithms or advertising, but I do love a bargain...

As Boney M were just wrapping up the tale of Ma Baker, I cut them short and opted for the TxK soundtrack instead. One of the tracks there seemed much more fitting. We have got a cassette here: ordinary audio cassette...

After musing on the cassettes meaning more than ordinary cassettes, and so on and so forth, I tore off the tape and opened the box, having assumed the seller had exaggerated the number. The guy was, however, not kidding.

The next logical step would have been to take a certain number from the box, sort those by software house and year of release first, and then get more out, repeating the process.

I, of course, got them all out before realising that simple fact. In my mind, I was already discovering some long-lost, mythical game among them. Or something mysterious and unmarked. A game that some chap from Nowhere-on-Trent had poured his entire heart and soul into forty years ago but never released, which would turn out to be a real gem.

I started with the names and logos that are permanently etched into my mind. Imagine, Ocean, Mastertronic, Codemasters. All easily identifiable. I did not even need to look at, or look up, the release years of the games. Easy.

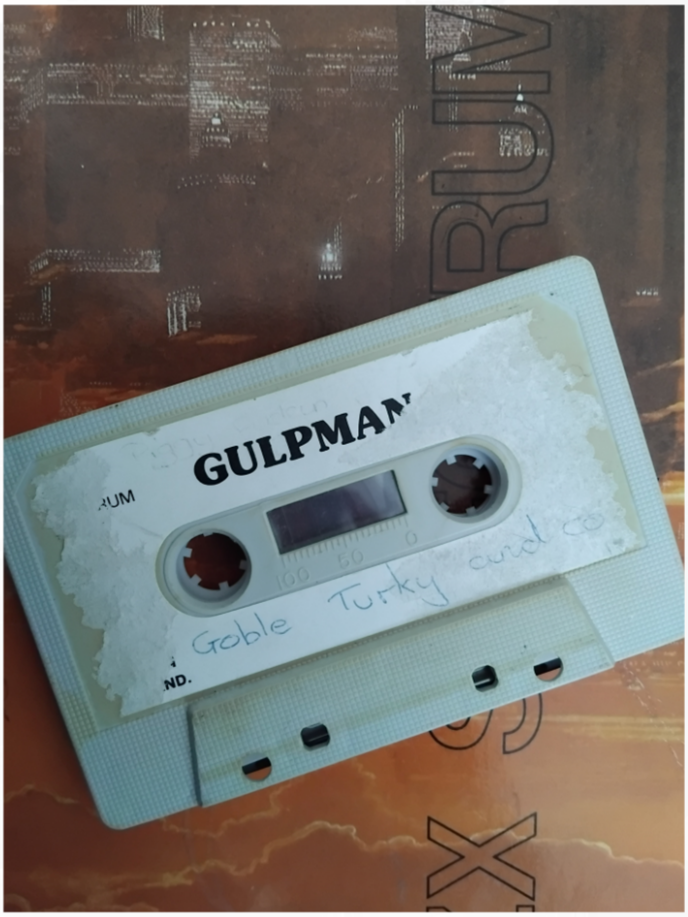
fantasy SOFTWARE
48 K SPECTRUM SIDE A
THE PYRAMID
LOAD "" ENTER
dk'tronics SPECTRUM SOFTWARE
16K & 48K SINCLAIR SPECTRUM
INVADERS
ADVENTURES OF ST.BERNARD
by Stephen Kirk
© Carnell Software Ltd 1983
This program may not be copied, lent, or hired.
2 CATTERPILLAR
2. MUSHROOM MANIA 3. 1994
KNOT IN 3D 5. PROJECT FUTURE
3
AME PACK SPECTRUM+2
ADD ON ELECTRONICS
FOR THE 48K SPECTRUM
TOBOR
GALACTIC TROOPER SPECTRUM 16/48K ROMIK SOFTWARE LTD
QUESTPROBE Featuring the HULK
SPECTRUM 48K

One cassette, however, half obscured by another one on top of it, appeared hand-labelled.Yes, I thought, that was it! The enigmatic...

GOBLE TURKY AND CO

Apparently.

The name did not quite evoke an air of mystery, and the neat, somewhat blocky handwriting was rather boring, but I thought nothing of it. I picked the cassette up. With the one on top out of the way, I could now clearly see the full label.



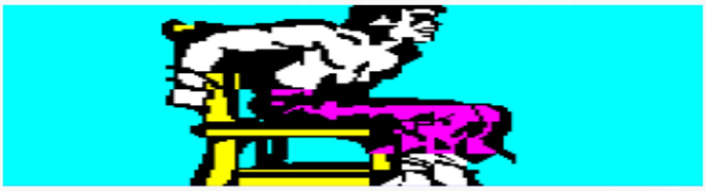
Gulpman.

Whether it was actually Gulpman or not, I was at the time unable to check as both of my Speccys are temporarily out of commission. This brings to mind the question, “Alright then, Grace, what *were* you planning to do with these in the meantime?”

I only became interested in the Speccy earlier this year, and very quickly realised that there are, quite literally, thousands of game titles out there. Starting with the most well-known, alongside the most recently released games, was easy enough. But the sheer volume often left me staring at my seemingly infinite list before eventually giving up and playing one of my favourites again for the umpteenth time.

Therefore, I decided to begin selecting games at random from my now meticulouslyorganised piles of cassettes to run in Fuse and ended up playing a number of games I do not think I would have normally picked.

Amongst the games I picked was Questprobe Featuring The Hulk, which I was rather sceptical about despite my undying love for text-based adventures. Admittedly, I am much more of a DC Comics person. In Questprobe, you begin as “Bruce Banner, tied hand & foot to a chair” : which is a bit of a predicament. And it turned out that you could not simply “HULK SMASH” your way out of everything...



However, within the constraints of a vocabulary consisting of 120 words, the game managed to tell a decent story with a nice balance between the thinking and the smashing (or, more accurately, biting your lip and remembering nightmares). And it included a fourth-wall break - one which I encountered with almost perfect timing, coinciding with a post I saw on Spectrum Computing about Scott Adams recently expressing interest in developing a new adventure game...

Next up, “ROMIK SOFTWARE PROUDLY PRESENTED... INSTRUCTIONS.” In Galactic Trooper, those were fairly straightforward, much like the game itself. You could get surprisingly far by simply positioning yourself well and shuffling your spaceship slightly left or right, and I did think that there was a sense of urgency missing here. You were, after all, trying to destroy the Galactic Attack Force and save the Earth from invasion...

There was, however, still an arcade-y feel to it, and clearing out the little alien guys felt pretty satisfying.

One of the things I loved most about Speccy games was the sheer variety of titles released for one system. It felt as though, at some point, someone had a go at making every single kind of game imaginable, cramming entire worlds - some admittedly much more underwhelming than others - into unassuming cassettes.

By picking cassettes at random, I ended up playing a much broader selection of games than I ever would have otherwise. Some were very good, some were utterly horrendous, but all were at least interesting.

It turned out that buying 130 random games was not a questionable decision, but actually a fairly decent one.

Epilogue

What was perhaps less wise was deciding to load a cassette in public without the faintest idea what was on it. On the loudest machine in the room, no less. In late September I found myself at the Derby Computer Museum, stepping into the genuinely lovely space with GOBLE TURKY & CO in hand and the firm conviction that I absolutely had to know what was on it.

The game refused to cooperate as I stared, slightly mortified, at the program name. It did not exactly suggest something you would have wanted to appear on a screen in a room full of strangers. One of the volunteers, somewhat amused by my predicament, offered a suggestion:
“Maybe they misspelt ‘ogre’?”

My mysterious cassette turned out to be more of an oddity than epiphany, but it gave me exactly what I was after - another story to add to the stack alongside the games themselves.

Asymmetry

Manu

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44484

Free

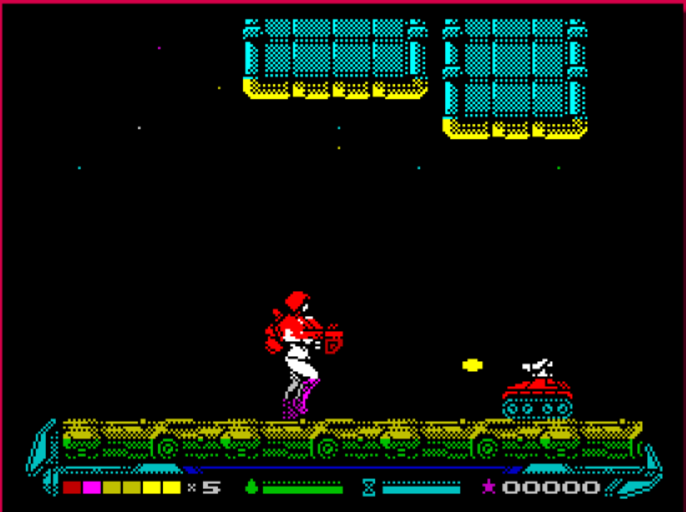
The year is 3025! No, that's not a typo. It's when the game is set. Anyway it turns out that a thousand years into the future mankind has built a peaceful society. Lovely stuff. Unfortunately this utopia suddenly finds itself caught in the crossfire between warring worlds and our finest cyborgs need to be retrained into killing machines to prevent total wipeout.

Asymmetry sees you take charge of one of these super cyborgs as you take the fight to the warmongering aliens in a sideways scrolling run & gun shoot 'em up.
Like many of the Yandex games, it pushes the boundaries of what should be possible on a humble Speccy.

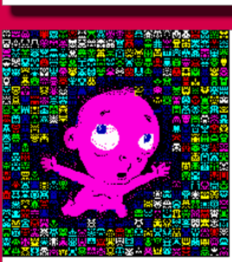
So many key ingredients of an award winning game are here: explosions of colour; huge chunky well defined characters that the late Don Priestley would be proud of; great music; a variety of fun power ups; clever parallax push scrolling. Each of its ten levels has an impressive boss and on some levels you even get to ride on vehicles. There is so much wizardry going on behind the scenes. It reminds me of the big colourful games like Savage and Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper. As a display of technical brilliance it is absolutely top tier.

My main worry with this kind of caper is that often they tend to throw everything in there except the gameplay. Is that true for Asymmetry? Well, not exactly, but you are so chonky and there's so much happening on the screen it's difficult to avoid getting hit by everything that moves (and everything that doesn't). Your size and speed coupled with the fact that you can only fire horizontally and not diagonally or vertically means you have to take evasive action against threats as soon as they appear and in some cases before they appear!

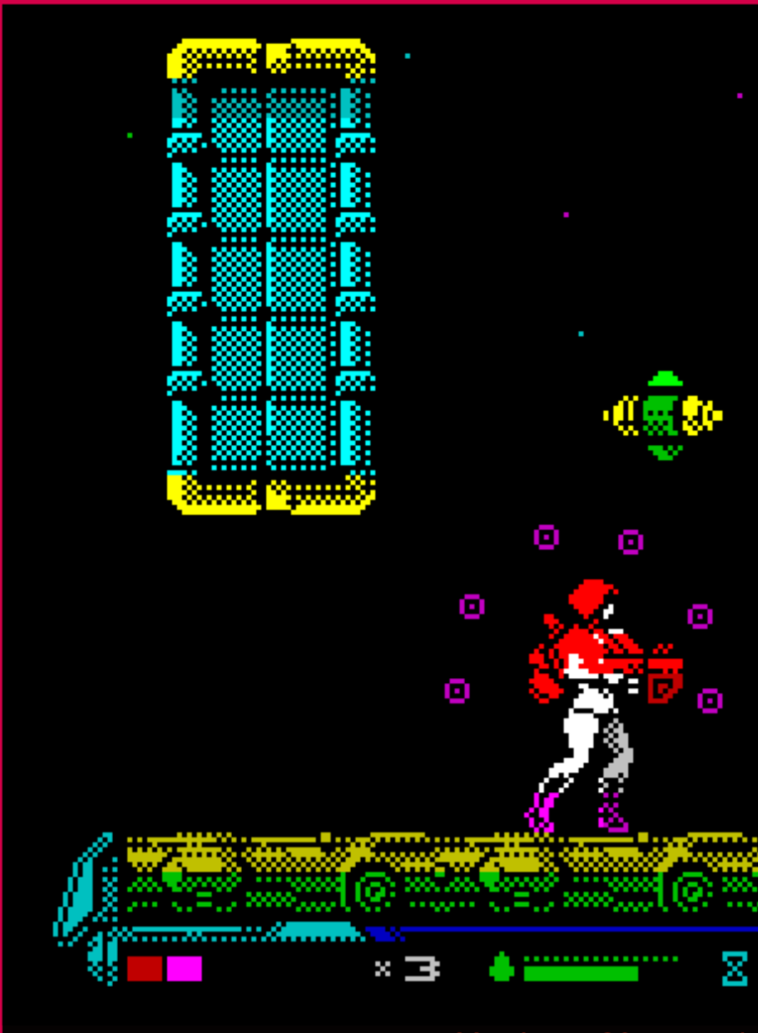
It remains however one of the most impressive Spectrum games I've seen in my entire life and I've played thousands of them. Even if you don't have the skills or patience to make progress in this game it is one that's well worth playing. In the same way that even if you're a world weary indie film nerd, you can still go and enjoy the latest eye-popping special effects laden blockbuster at the IMAX.



Full health? That won't last long.



I *am* one of the world-weary indie nerds that Sloany describes, so I begrudgingly swapped my polo neck for something with 'SuperDry' written on it, and immersed myself in this latest AAA release. Like many blockbusters, it has a hackneyed plot: humanity can only be saved by

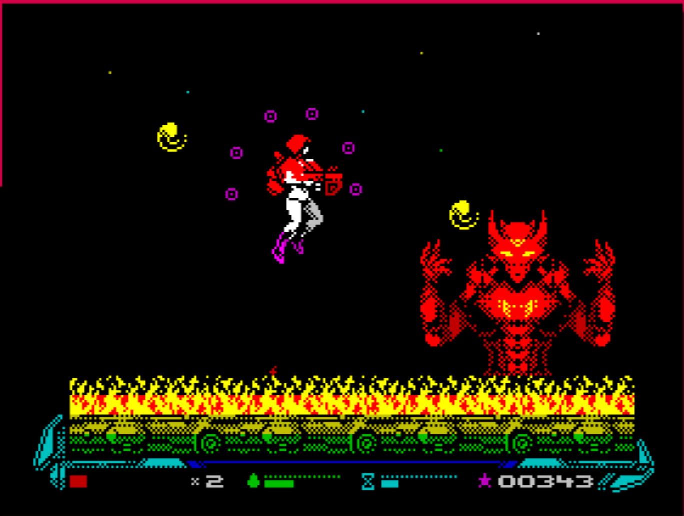


You have 20 seconds

a legion of lithe, attractive redhead cyborgs wearing gratuitous battle issue thongs. To be fair it has a sense of humour too, with the ‘add personality’ cut-scene that gives our hero an asymmetric haircut. Anyway, we’re here for the razzle-dazzle, and by god it delivers.

It’s from some of the same team that are part of Zosya Entertainment, so it’s no surprise that this game is a fast running firework display in the same vein as ‘Valley of Rains’ and ‘Seraphima’. It’s quite simply a fantastic shoot-em-up, but there are adventure elements too: for example you need to backtrack to find a pneumatic stomper and use it to smash open a pathway. That’s one thing that could be clearer—you can use some of the enemies as vehicles once you subdue them. That balances the gameplay and means you don’t have to worry so much about fuel running out.

Oddly enough, the bosses are the least impressive part, but that’s only because everything else is so jaw dropping. Making all this happen on a Spectrum, including a barely compromised 48K version, is amazing. I’m so glad I went to the IMAX.



Having one hell of a good time.

s to comply

Here we have yet another high quality Yandex release. In this one you take the role of a cyborg - codename Memi 8999 LM. Hmm - she seems a bit moody to me. Luckily, we can change that! Press any key to inject personality… dum de dum.. done. Look at that - we’ve given her a captivating smile! On to the game…

I was reminded a bit of Turrican at the start, especially the way Memi moves and the nature of the power-ups - and who doesn’t love Turrican? The gameplay is fast and furious, and the technical execution is simply outstanding. Everything is so big and colourful, and it all runs so smoothly it’s hard to believe this is a Speccy game. There’s always so much happening on screen at once — sometimes a little too much if I’m honest - I had to rest my eyes and give my head a wobble after playing this.

Alien-jellyfish type creatures swarm you from every direction, attacking relentlessly. I don’t like jellyfish so I had a good time blasting them. I found it wasn’t a good idea to stand still for too long - the screen will fill up with too many baddies to handle. But running away didn’t work out very well for me either. You’ll need to have a good few replays and come up with a battle plan for each of the (relatively short) levels. Yes, it’s difficult — but if you’re afraid of a tough shoot-’em-up, then Speccy gaming probably isn’t for you!

Still, as punishing as it can be, it really does have that irresistible “one more go” quality. Every tiny bit of progress feels like a genuine victory, and that’s what keeps dragging you back in. The satisfaction of finally cracking a level after half a dozen failed attempts is worth every bit of the frustration. In fact, I think I’ll go and have another quick blast right now. Come on Memi, show us that smile!

Under the Hood

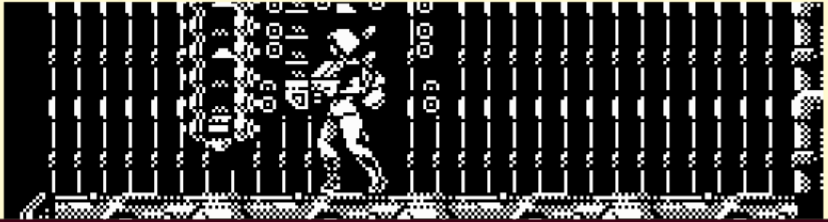
Dave was so impressed by the smoothness of the scroll in Asymmetry that he did a little poking about in the code.

See, ‘regular’ scrolling usually involves rotating the bytes in a hidden screen stored in memory , one pixel at a time, and then transferring it to the TV display. This is very expensive on CPU time, and slows games down a lot. It’s technically challenging to make a game run at a playable speed.

Asymmetry’s main trick is to not waste time doing things that don’t need to be done: it draws the scenery directly onto the screen, and doesn’t scroll empty spaces. It also doesn’t delete the background pixels, it simply hides them under squares of black paper/black ink. It’s not a brand new trick—Zynaps does something similar—but it requires a seriously proficient coder to pull it off.

If you enter these POKEs just after loading, you can see what’s going on in the background : 38048,60 & 36332,0

Below, you can see the normally hidden remnants of the scroll, made visible through magical POKEry.



Sam's Ashes Nightmare

Michael Wadlow

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44579

£2/ PWYW

A cricket based game! That probably means that this review calls for some clever cricket-based puns and wordplay - but I'm afraid I'm not familiar enough with the sport to think of one 'off the bat'. I'll have a good think and try to come up with one or two before the end of the review. *(Don't feel obliged - Ed)*

The England Ashes team have lost their cricket bats - the silly beggers! It falls to you, Kitman Sam (and general team skivvy, by the sounds of it) to venture forth, find them and bring them home - thereby restoring England's cricketing pride. Hiding in the shadows is the ghost of W.G. Grace himself, but I didn't come across him - unless he's the nasty who looks like one of Pacman's enemies. The cricket bats have been scattered over 8 levels set in a haunted forest, which instantly reminded me of Mastertronic's 1985 platformer Chiller. Made using MPAGD, what first struck me was the playability - it's very easy to get into, and the difficulty lands just right.

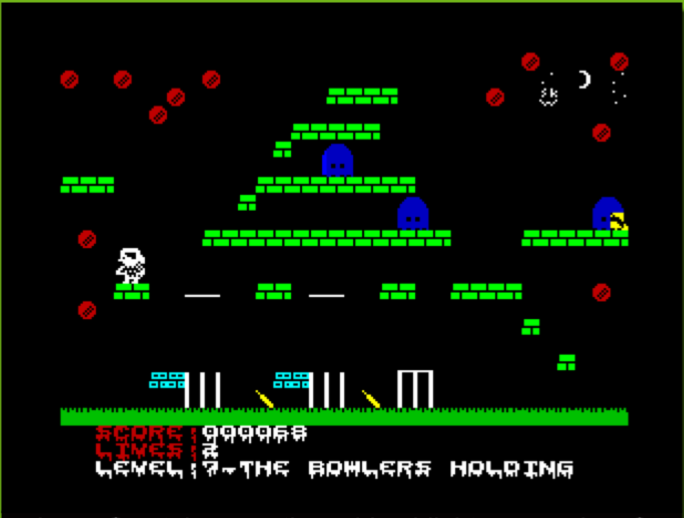
The first couple of levels play like your standard Speccy collect-a-thon- then level 5 throws you a curveball (or googly?).
The single baddy on that screen (might have been a polystyrene coffee cup - it looked like a polystyrene coffee cup to me!) started tracking my movements and following me about! (A bit like when the mother duck escapes in Chuckie Egg). This added a whole new strategy element to the level - avoiding Mr Cappuccino-to-go whilst picking up the bats - and after that the game really started to get into its stride, introducing other inventive nasties such as acid rain and ghostly cricket stumps.

The levels get gradually more perplexing - until the last level - which is the easiest level of the lot in my view! I enjoyed working out the best routes through each stage, though I have to mention the collision detection is a bit ropey. More than once I lost a life without anything actually touching me. Speaking of lives, you only get two. Two lives! That's just not cricket.

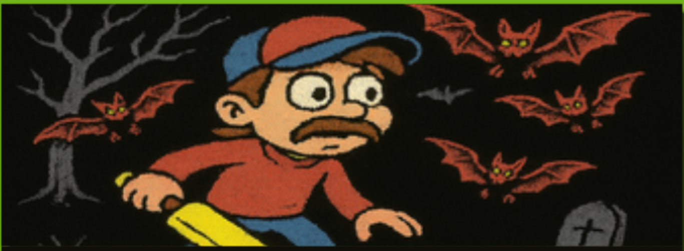
It's not a very long game, but the author mentions he made it on one rainy Saturday afternoon, which is quite an accomplishment.

And now, the cricket pun I promised!
Let's see...
"Sam's Ashes Nightmare won't knock you for six - but at least it doesn't leave you stumped!"

Howzat, then? *(Really, you shouldn't have - Ed)*



I say, Carstairs - are those blue blighters members?



Sam, looking a lot like Graham Gooch

Australia seems a much different place than the last Ashes tour there; malevolent spirits roam, slime oozes and even the wickets are cursed, causing instant death if touched. It's just not Cricket!

After the remapping of my brain with the rather good Hammer Time… I mean Hammer Knight, it's nice to get back to basics. No more than left, right and jump apply here. Jump over the wickets, avoid the ghosts, and get the bats back. Great.

Graphics and presentation are all pretty simple, and that's not a bad thing. Sometimes you can overdo this on the old Speccy, and sometimes less is more. And whilst I found the collision detection to be unfair on occasions, there's nothing here that can't be overcome with sharp reactions. The clear objective helps; no exit to worry about. The level is finished once the last bat has been retrieved.

Look out for the ghost of W.G. Grace, who is there to remind Sam that he must succeed or the Ashes are lost. And of course, we wouldn't want that now, would we? (I suspect at this point, no one in Australia would be playing this. Ever. But then, I don't recall the Speccy being popular over there).

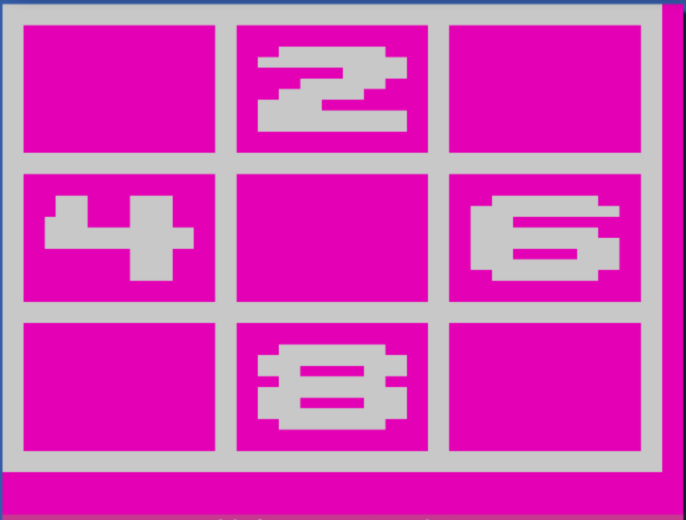
It's a fairly short game, but it's up to YOU to help England to win the Ashes, which in itself is quite appealing, as Cricketers and Cricket fans are a superstitious bunch, I recommend you join the Barmy Army and get this little beauty. It can't harm any, can it?

Brain Teaser

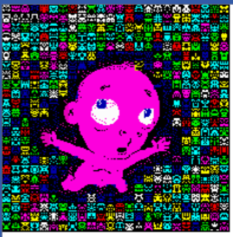
Yevrowl

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44599

Free



Ain’t never too late



After Sinclair BASIC, what’s your favourite operating system? I asked around the Break Space office and answers varied from Linux to Android to ‘Can’t you see I’m on the toilet?’. I have a soft-spot for Windows XP, probably because of the abominable Windows Vista that followed it, but I’ve never been fond enough to want to make a game for it. But that’s not a million miles from where BrainTeaser started—Wim Nijland released a puzzle game in 1993 for IBM’s OS/2. Now, about thirty two years later and exactly 24 bits fewer, Y. R. Sova has ported it to the MSX and ZX-Spectrum.

It’s a simple concept that’s hard to explain. Brace yourself: there’s a 3 x 3 grid with each position numbered 1-9. The numbers are only so you know which key to press—it’s not an arithmetic puzzle. You can press any number you see on the grid. Press a corner number (1,3,7,9) and it toggles itself and the 3 squares it’s touching. Press a middle-edge number (2,4,6,8) and it toggles itself and the other two on that edge. That leaves number 5, press that and it toggles a cross shape (2,4,5,6,8). The aim of the game is to end with every number except 5 set. If you clear the grid entirely you lose. Does that make sense? Should I take another pass at that? *(No, and GET OUT OF THE TOILET! - Ed)*

It’s a really intriguing mechanic where you can quickly reach the stage where it’s not a question of whether you can win a grid, but how long will it take. Yet it always feels like completely mastering it is right there, screaming in your face, and somehow just out of reach at the same time.

Brain Teaser is the kind of puzzle that doesn’t need a fancy interface—as long as it works better than a blackboard or a Cambridge Z88 it’ll still be enjoyable. So you’ll need to tread very carefully if you’re porting it with intent to include knobs & whistles. The Spectrum port gets it right. It’s a more inspiring interface that functions perfectly well. The keys are responsive and it looks nice, with huge letters and a colour scheme that says "I'm a ZX-Spectrum, want to make something of it?".

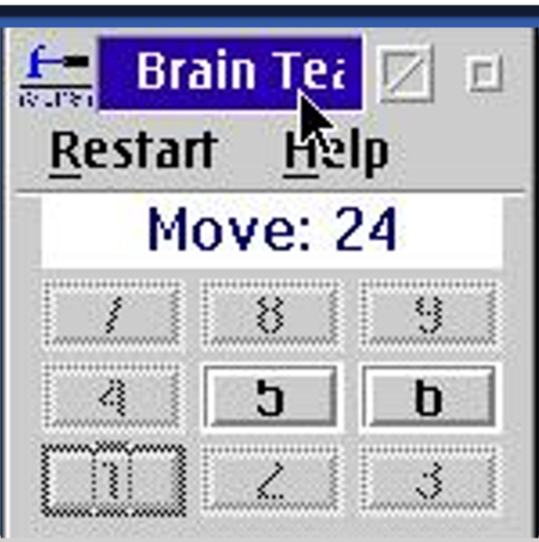
Thanks to Wim for making this game in the first place, and to Yevrowl for bringing it to a wider audience. It’s also a nice reminder that every computer is probably *someone’s* Spectrum.

After reading Dave's review, I felt suitably prepared for a session of this fine puzzle game. So I booted it up, stared at the screen for a few minutes, hit a couple of buttons, and then returned to Dave's instructions. I shook my head a few times, read them again very, very, very slowly, took a Nurofen, and had another go.

I eventually started to grasp what the aim of the game was—but I think that was despite Dave's explanation, not because of it! Here's my diluted guide: bash the numbers you see until all the numbers remain apart from the 5. Get worked up. Go for a cup of tea.

Dave also mentions that "the feeling of completely mastering it was always there, screaming in your face". Well, I never got that feeling! If anything was screaming in my face, it was more along the lines of: "Ha ha, sucks to be you, thick-o! Nah, nah, nah!!"

The graphics are simplicity itself, and do the job they are meant to do — and a lot more splendid than the old calculator aesthetic from the IBM. A game like this is either going to instantly appeal or have you running for the hills. So, : Do you like brain teasers? Yes? Well then—"Brain Teaser" is for you!



Move: 24

The OS/2 OG. A face not even a mother could love

The Farmer

Nextric

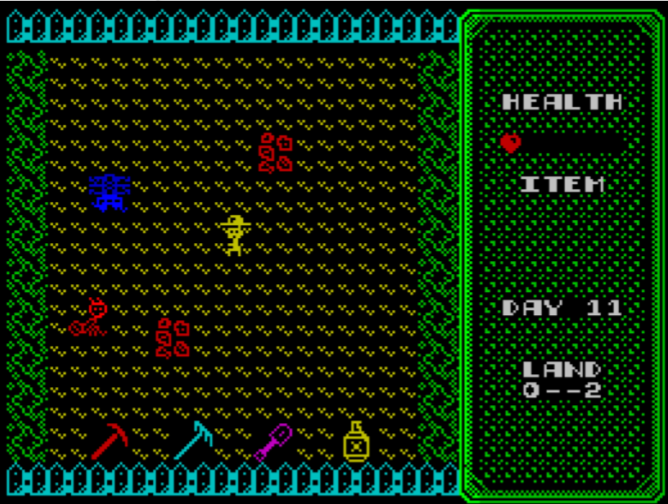
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44565

PWYW / $2

Ooh-aar! Here we have another worthy entry in the Basic Concorso Compo 2025. This has been programmed using compiled BASIC - which, for the uninitiated means it's coded in BASIC, but then uses a BASIC compiler to speed it up. A BASIC game on steroids. (Basically!)

You play as poor, downtrodden Farmer Perico Sanchez, who's forced to abandon his homeland thanks to corruption, poverty, and political instability. Mmmm, not exactly Rainbow Islands, then. Perico now scrapes a living by tending other people's fields, and it's your job to help him survive long enough to one day get back on his feet.

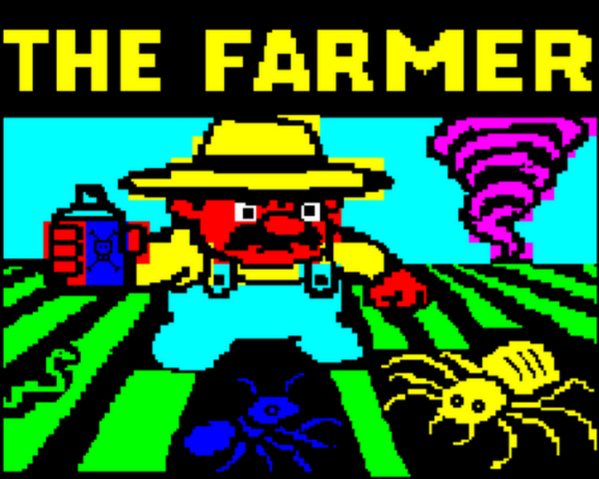
At the bottom of the play area sit your farming tools: a pickaxe, rake and spade, plus your cultivating essentials — seeds, watering can and a basket. A quick prod of the fire button (M) cycles between them, and it's obvious what tool is required, because the soil patches change colour to match the tool you need. Rocky ground is red - so you'll need the red pickake, you see? You can only carry one tool at a time - so you'll be forever darting about, grabbing the right implement before the pests stroll over your hard work and undo it all.



One health left? The scythe swings for thee.

Luckily, you can pick up a can of insecticide to kill pests (snails, spiders and birds) — though don't expect your can of bug spray to help you battle the tornadoes. I'm no meteorologist, but I should think that holds true in real life as well. Watch out though - bump into a pest without holding your can of insecticide and your energy bar is going to take a wallop!

As the days tick by, things get hectic fast: more mounds of earth to tend, more pests, more weather events, and more dashing about. Exactly the sort of game that you'd find in the arcades back in the early 80s!

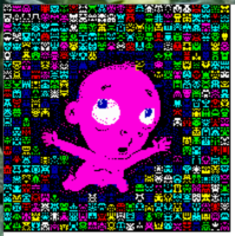


Bug spray? I thought it was sun block!

There are no power ups to speak of - so it's a case of seeing how many days you can survive before your health bar hits zero.

If the game had a scoring system, that would change everything! But, unfortunately, it doesn't - and with an arcade game like this I think it's crying out for one.

Frustrating at times? Perhaps. But fun? Yes Indeedy!



Who'd be a farmer eh? Up at 4am to go and milk the turnips, and you can't even enjoy your morning cider break without seeing Chris Packham on TV wagging his finger at you for not encouraging weasels. If that wasn't bad enough you've got to listen to The Archers to learn when to plant the porridge.

The protagonist in this game finds himself in even more parlous circumstances; poor Perico has more in common with Sisyphus than Eddy Grundy.

These 'protect & nurture the thing while other things try to spoil it' games (this genre needs a catchier name) require careful balancing of the gameplay, because basically you're spending your time fending off annoyances. Nextric gets it about right. I reached Day 10 fairly quickly, but I could see the literal stormclouds brewing and obviously Day 15 was going to be a battle.

The screen layout is well designed, and that's vital when you have multiple tools you need to access quickly. It all looks good too, though I have to confess I mistook the spiders for crop sprayers, and the tornados for amorphous cyan blobs (the author politely put me right).

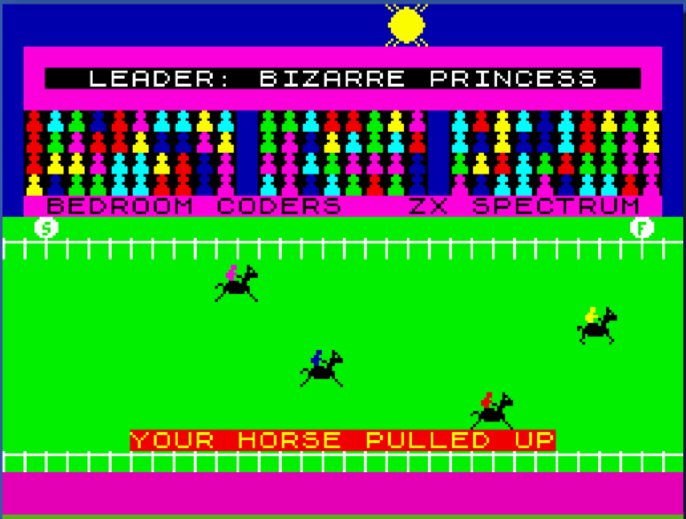
I enjoyed this little game. It's fresh, playable, and only uses Boriel's finest organic BASIC.

Racetrack Riches

Bedroom Coders

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44551

PWYW / £2



A watched race always spoils.

Racetrack Riches is a tribute to the author's long-lost first ZX-Spectrum game, recreating the title he made when aged just 15. So MJ Hibbett's song rings true—'they bought it to help with the homework, and to facilitate underage gambling'.

On loading you get asked "Would you like music (Y/N)", and you definitely would, for the first few games. There are several tunes such as Congratulations & Celebrations and even the Darth Vader theme! If a beepified version of 'Happy Days Are Here Again' doesn't make you smile, you need to book tickets to see the Great clown Pagliacci. *(But Dave… etc.. - Sad Ed)*

This game thrusts a crisp £50 into your palm and invites you to a day at the races. Over the course of six events, you make a choice from one of four randomly (and sometimes amusingly) named horses. Honest John the bookmaker gives you the odds, and that's about all you get to go on. Beyond that, you just have to pick which name you like, or whichever your Aunt Edna has a good feeling about. Both methods will prove unreliable.

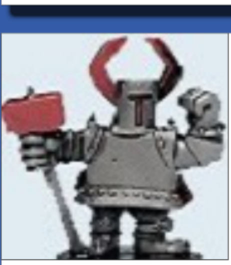
It does tell you a bit about the track, or the 'going' as tweed-clad pundits are pleased to call it. Apparently there's a way of using it to decide how likely your horse is to be injured. I never worked it out—mine just seemed to pull-up when I had the most to lose.

The races themselves are fun to watch, obviously more so when you have skin in the game. I've seen last minute surges and wins by a whisker that I can only describe as a bit thrilling. They must have been, because I punched the air and said YESSSS! Winning a hypothetical £21.90 can do that to a man.

Results are weighted towards better odds, but you will still see surprise victories by the 30-1 outsider. If you want to get on the Hi-Score table you'll probably need one of those. In my experience the second best odds were more likely to win. After I'd already chosen the favourite that is.

And that's what I often felt about the game—that it was out to diddle me. However, after investigation I can say that's not the case, and the outcome of a race is decided before you've placed your bet. So it's a well balanced game that's probably quite an accurate reflection of betting on the GeeGees in real life.

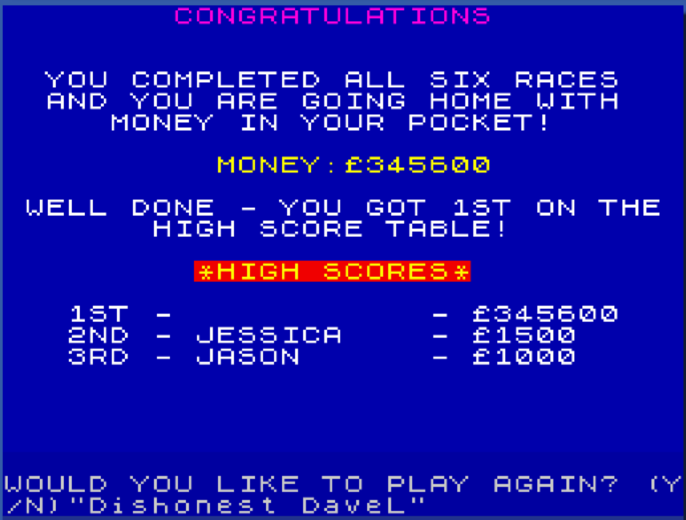
Now I feel bad about speculating on Honest John's parentage and demanding a retest of Rainbow Orchid's urine sample. This is why I'm banned from Ladbrokes.



Much like Beat the Bookie, reviewed way back in issue 2, this is a game about gambling on the horses made by a teenager. What was going on in the 80s? Where were the parents? At least modern kids don't do that, instead safely gambling on gathca loot boxes and Counterstrike matches. Progress, eh? Wonderful.

And like BtB, this is oddly compelling, with the colourful races playing out randomly in real time before your very eyes. It has the same undeniable yet inexplicable thrill as watching the stickmen knock a ball about on Football Manager, or watching people making entirely uninformed decisions about boxes on Deal or No Deal. We're all just drooling dogs, in the end.

Umm… Where was I going with this? I'm not sure. You'll get exactly what you expect here. The beeper music's great fun, it's a colourful, simple pastime. Winner alright, Winner alright.



```
               CONGRATULATIONS

       YOU COMPLETED ALL SIX RACES
       AND YOU ARE GOING HOME WITH
          MONEY IN YOUR POCKET!

              MONEY:£345600

     WELL DONE - YOU GOT 1ST ON THE
           HIGH SCORE TABLE!

              *HIGH SCORES*

        1ST -               - £345600
        2ND - JESSICA       - £1500
        3RD - JASON         - £1000



WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY AGAIN? (Y
/N) "Dishonest DaveL"
```

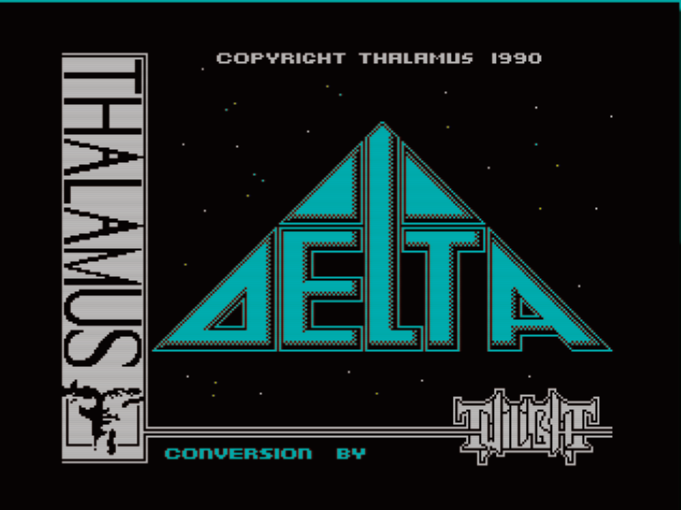
Dave, we need to talk about snapshots.

Delta Charge!

Thalamus Digital

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/1335

$1



It's all Greek to me

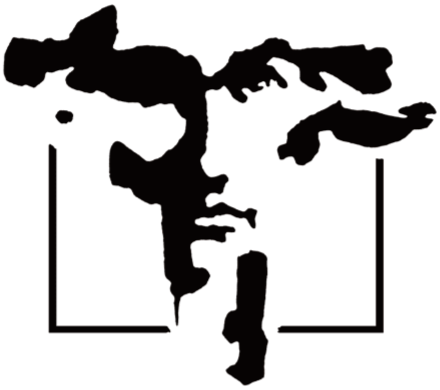
Before I commence with the review, I want to make something clear: when I opine about games, I like to play them fresh: no cheats; no maps; no walk-throughs; no save states; no help of any kind. I'll note that was not the best strategy for the fun but frustrating Boni in Bat Hell! (another game with an exclamation mark in its title), but for this, one I know so well on that other system I mentioned below, I had to do something. Everything seemed just too difficult and unfair, and I was getting annoyed. Anyway, on with the review.

We really are in good times when publishers are re-releasing their old 8-bit games again, although I do yearn for a good old physical media production sometimes. To be fair, most of the new Speccy games I've been playing recently are digital only. I can't complain if Thalamus Digital Publishing, Ltd, is offering Delta Charge! as a tape image or TZX file only, can I?

This is not so much a port of, but a game inspired by, an original Commodore C64 sideways scrolling shoot-em up called Delta. Whilst the weaponry upgrades are the same, the graphics monochrome renditions of its source material, and some of the attack patterns close to it, this is a very different beast. If you know of Stavros Fasoulas's classic, as I do, forget being able to ace through this one, you need to learn an entirely new strategy to progress.

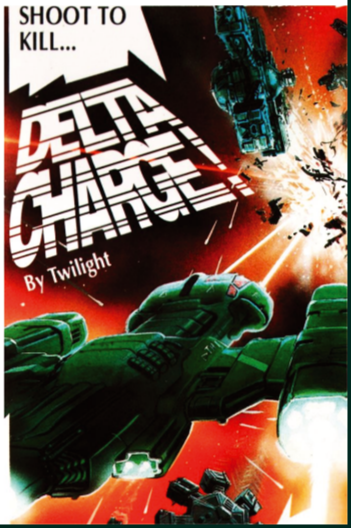
I watched a walk through from gaming Sensi /Y\ad/Y\atty, and here's the thing: in order to progress, it's not so much a question of shooting wave after wave of alien scum, it's actually not doing that, but strategically moving to avoid some of the attacks, and also the blocks which are either collectables to upgrade your ship, or just blocks that'll obliterate you. You therefore have to learn when to attack, when to collect power ups, and when and how to manoeuvre safely to avoid either protagonists or the upgrade bricks. Only then will you get to see level 2 and beyond.

What's good about this then? Well, it's got some rather nice parallaxed starfield, and the attack patterns are fast, the animations are smooth and the whole thing is sometimes an intense experience. But it's not like most other shooty space type games I know. Despite my initial frustrations (treating it like a Delta port for the Speccy), and having to essentially cheat my way through (shame… SHAME!) by carefully watching and learning the pixel perfect movements required from said walkthrough, there is a game here if you're willing to be persistent. And for only $1, it's okay by me now I've made peace with it.



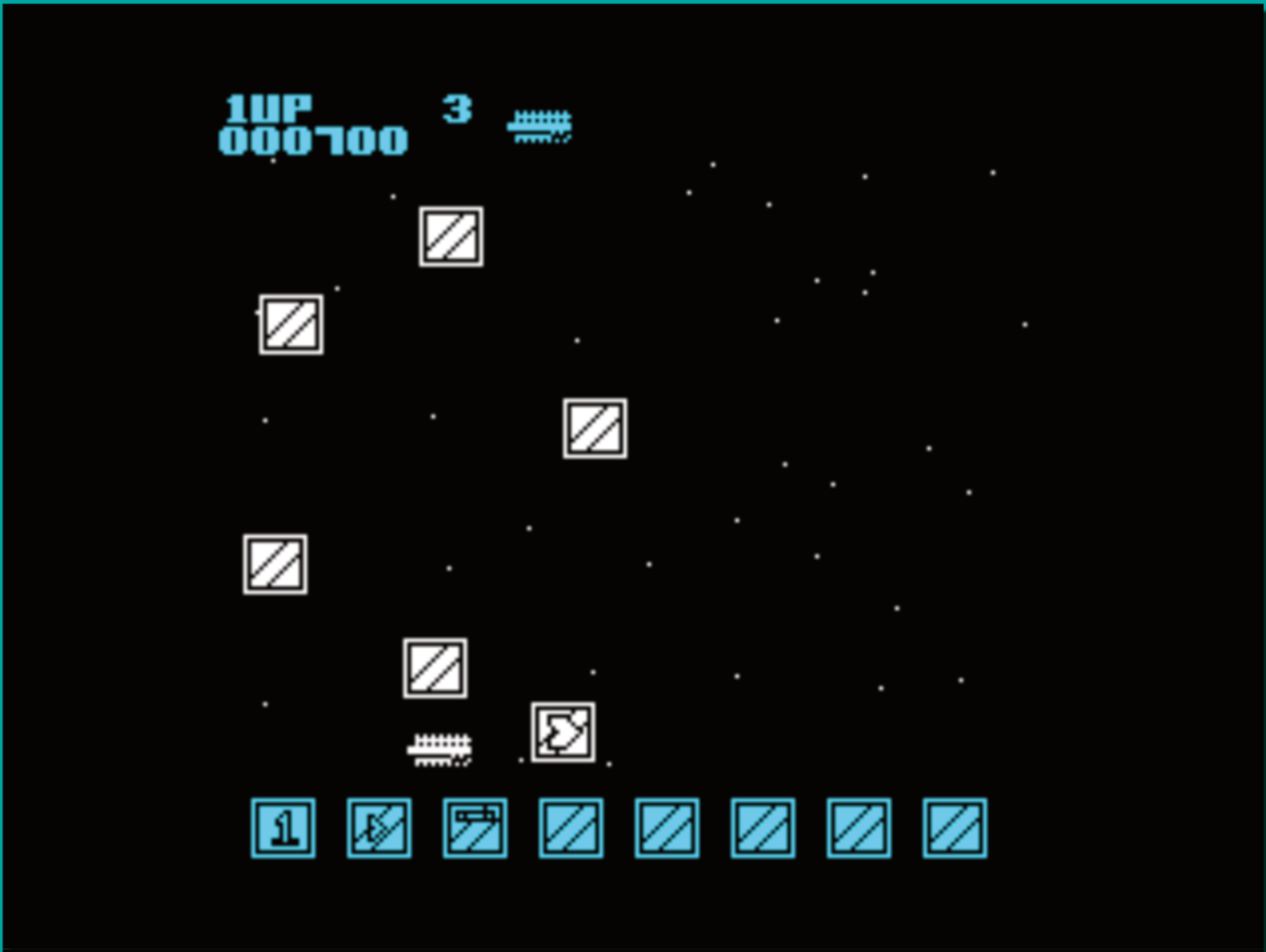
Thalamus was founded in 1986 by Newsfield, publishers of Crash magazine, to use their relationships within the industry to get into the game publishing lark, not just the game-talking-about side of things.

Sadly for Spectrum-, and indeed, Crash-, loyalists, the company's focus was largely the C64, with quality titles like Sanxion, Delta, Hawkeye and Armalyte doing very nicely indeed. Of 28 titles, only Delta Charge and Sanxion were released for the Spectrum.


SHOOT TO KILL...
DELTA CHARGE!
By Twilight

Armalyte almost made it, with a single-level demo appearing on a Your Sinclair tape before Thalamus pulled the plug.
Try it out at :
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/9497/ZX-Spectrum/Armalyte

The best things about Thalamus games, however?
That awesome logo, and those Oliver Frey covers.



“More speed, Vicar?” “Don’t mind if I do.”

“What is ‘Delta Charge’?” I wondered, loading the game with optimistic curiosity. It certainly isn’t the speed of your ship - that much becomes painfully clear within seconds. Your vessel crawls across the screen so slowly that success depends not on reflexes, but on precise memorisation. You must already know where enemies will appear and manoeuvre into position before they’re even visible. The real skill test, however, comes in the form of obstacle screens: walls of blocks you must dodge, not destroy. The first level alone features a brutal barrier with a gap so narrow it feels almost deliberately cruel.

Frustrated, I did what any reasonable player would: I read the manual. It spoke enticingly of a deep upgrade system, but offered no clue how to actually earn those power-ups. That’s when I stumbled upon the game’s first piece of esoteric knowledge: destroy a full wave of enemies, and you unlock a future upgrade opportunity. Those impassable walls of blocks? Some now conceal power-ups. It’s a fun, if hidden, mechanic.

Here’s the catch: no matter how many waves you clear, you can only choose one upgrade per opportunity. My advice? Pick speed. Always speed. Two upgrades in, my ship transformed from a cosmic tortoise into a nimble fighter, finally allowing me to engage enemies on equal footing. The feeling was thrilling, a true “whoo-hoo!” moment.

From there, the game opens up and becomes intensely enjoyable, though a few rough edges remain. The absence of music is a noticeable omission in a paid for title, leaving the experience feeling a little sparse. A more significant issue is visual clarity: your ship flies through a star-field of tiny white dots while being shot at by tiny white bullets. I often exploded without knowing why, until I learned to decipher the subtle threat hidden among the stars.

But what Delta Charge absolutely nails is the power fantasy. Every upgrade, be it multidirectional firing, rapid fire, or raw speed makes you feel unstoppable. Crucially, you retain all upgrades after death, an essential mercy that makes later levels surmountable.

In the end, Delta Charge is a game that transforms into a fast paced enjoyable shooter. Once I learned its secrets and saw past its limitations, I had an absolute blast. Although, given that I missed the upgrade system and invisible bullets at first… perhaps the real hidden knowledge was that I need an eye test. *(Have you considered removing your sunglasses? - Ed)*

Time for some type-in hallowe'en horroe with …

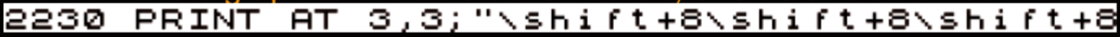
Shriek Space!

Written by
Snorkers, exclusively
for BreakSpace

You're working late at Break Space Towers when a storm causes a power-cut.
You need to find the last 10 pages so you can publish before the Editor arrives at 9am... But wait!
What was that noise?
Oh no! It turns out that Break Space Towers is haunted! By GHOSTS!

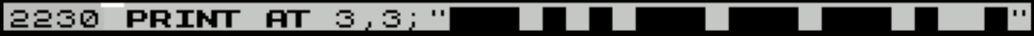
Can you collect the pages and publish Break Space in time to avoid the Editor's wrath, or will you be scared to death?
If you're lucky, you might come across a nice cup of tea to calm your nerves, or a candle to drive back the darkness.

NOTE - Where graphics characters are needed, Snorkers has marked them with \, like on line 2230 :



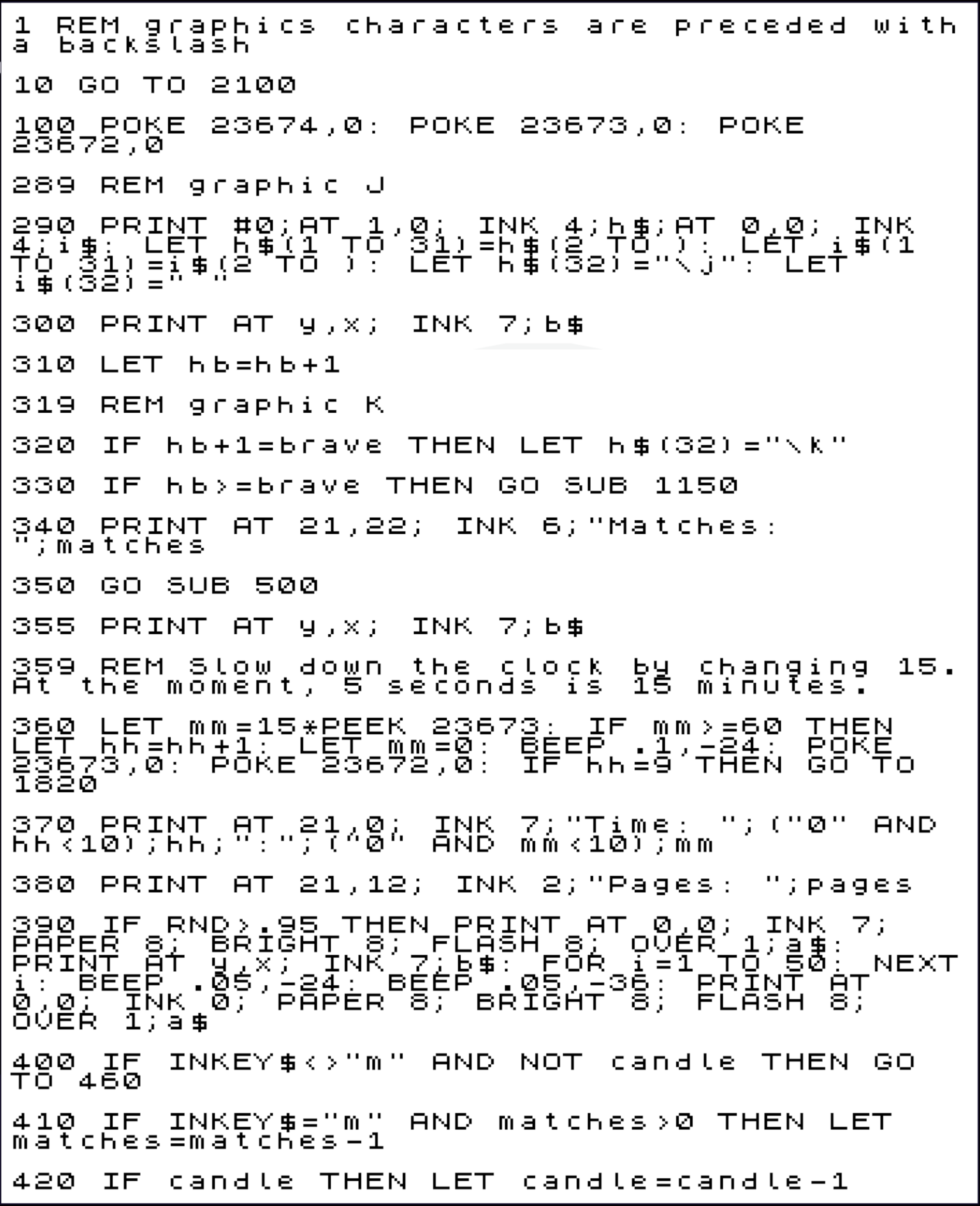
```
2230 PRINT AT 3,3;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
```

You 'll need to activate the Graphics mode cursor to enter the special characters. Toggle graphics mode ON/Off with CAPS SHIFT+9.
If you're using BASin, hold Alt-GR to activate graphics mode.
So line 2230, for instance, should look like this :



```
2230 PRINT AT 3,3;"                "
```

Don't forget to toggle Graphics mode off again with SHIFT+9 (Or release Alt-GR)
As always, REM statements are to explain what the code does and don't need to be typed in.



```
1 REM graphics characters are preceded with a backslash

10 GO TO 2100

100 POKE 23674,0: POKE 23673,0: POKE 23672,0

289 REM graphic J

290 PRINT #0;AT 1,0; INK 4;h$;AT 0,0; INK 4;i$: LET h$(1 TO 31)=h$(2 TO ): LET i$(1 TO 31)=i$(2 TO ): LET h$(32)="\j": LET i$(32)=" "

300 PRINT AT y,x; INK 7;b$

310 LET hb=hb+1

319 REM graphic K

320 IF hb+1=brave THEN LET h$(32)="\k"

330 IF hb>=brave THEN GO SUB 1150

340 PRINT AT 21,22; INK 6;"Matches: ";matches

350 GO SUB 500

355 PRINT AT y,x; INK 7;b$

359 REM Slow down the clock by changing 15. At the moment, 5 seconds is 15 minutes.

360 LET mm=15*PEEK 23673: IF mm>=60 THEN LET hh=hh+1: LET mm=0: BEEP .1,-24: POKE 23673,0: POKE 23672,0: IF hh=9 THEN GO TO 1820

370 PRINT AT 21,0; INK 7;"Time: ";("0" AND hh<10);hh;":";("0" AND mm<10);mm

380 PRINT AT 21,12; INK 2;"Pages: ";pages

390 IF RND>.95 THEN PRINT AT 0,0; INK 7; PAPER 8; BRIGHT 8; FLASH 8; OVER 1;a$: PRINT AT y,x; INK 7;b$: FOR i=1 TO 50: NEXT i: BEEP .05,-24: BEEP .05,-36: PRINT AT 0,0; INK 0; PAPER 8; BRIGHT 8; FLASH 8; OVER 1;a$

400 IF INKEY$<>"m" AND NOT candle THEN GO TO 460

410 IF INKEY$="m" AND matches>0 THEN LET matches=matches-1

420 IF candle THEN LET candle=candle-1
```

```
430 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 6; PAPER 8; BRIGHT 8;
FLASH 8; OVER 1;a$:

450 IF NOT candle THEN PRINT AT 0,0; INK 0;
PAPER 8; BRIGHT 8; FLASH 8; OVER 1;a$

460 GO TO 290

500 LET c$=b$

509 REM graphic B

510 IF INKEY$="o" AND x>1 THEN PRINT AT
y,x;" ": LET x=x-1: LET b$="\b"

519 REM graphic C

520 IF INKEY$="p" AND x<30 THEN PRINT AT
y,x;" ": LET x=x+1: LET b$="\c"

529 REM graphic D

530 IF INKEY$="a" AND y<19 THEN PRINT AT
y,x;" ": LET y=y+1: LET b$="\d"

539 REM graphic E

540 IF INKEY$="q" AND y>1 THEN PRINT AT
y,x;" ": LET y=y-1: LET b$="\e"

550 LET byte=ATTR (y,x)

560 IF byte>=128 THEN PRINT #0;AT 0,0; INK
7; PAPER 0; FLASH 1;"Collected!": LET
pages=pages+1: BEEP .25,3*pages: PAUSE 50:
IF pages=10 THEN GO TO 1670

570 IF byte=64 THEN PRINT #0;AT 0,0; INK 7;
PAPER 0; FLASH 1;"Boo!": LET brave=brave-1:
BEEP .25,brave: IF brave=0 THEN GO TO 1720

580 IF x=cx AND y=cy THEN PRINT #0;AT 0,0;
INK 7; PAPER 0; FLASH 1;"A nice cup of
tea!": LET brave=8: BEEP .25,brave*2: LET
cx=-1

589 REM make the candle last longer by
changing the "candle" variable

590 IF x=lx AND y=ly THEN PRINT #0;AT 0,0;
INK 7; PAPER 0; FLASH 1;"A candle!": LET
candle=32: PAUSE 50: LET lx=-1

600 IF byte<64 THEN PRINT #0;AT 0,0;"
": REM 18 spaces

609 REM graphic A

610 IF c$=b$ THEN LET b$="\a"

620 RETURN

1000 REM heartbeat

1150 OUT 254,16: OUT 254,0

1160 FOR i=1 TO 20: NEXT i: REM this forces
a small pause. PAUSE doesn't work if you're
pressing a key!
```

```
1170 OUT 254,16: OUT 254,0
1179 REM graphic L and graphic M
1180 LET h$(32)="\l": LET i$(32)="\m"
1190 LET hb=0
1200 RETURN
1670 REM Victory
1680 PAPER 7: INK 3: CLS
1690 PRINT AT 10,0;"You beat the ghosts and
got"'"BREAK SPACE to the printers!"'"Well
done!"
1700 FOR i=-12 TO 12: BEEP .1,i: NEXT i
1710 PAUSE 0: GO TO 1980
1720 REM Scared to death
1730 CLS : INK 7: CIRCLE 125,100,50: CIRCLE
145,120,10: CIRCLE 105,120,10
1740 CIRCLE 145,120,5: CIRCLE 105,120,5
1750 PLOT 125,75: DRAW -20,-10: DRAW 40,0,-
3: DRAW -20,10
1760 FOR i=-10 TO 0: PLOT 125+i*5,150+i*3:
DRAW i,20: PLOT 175+i*5,120-i*3: DRAW
10+i,20: NEXT i
1770 PRINT AT 17,7; FLASH 1;"SCARED TO
DEATH!!!"
1780 RESTORE 4600
1790 READ tempo
1800 FOR i=1 TO 19: GO SUB 2050: NEXT i
1810 PAUSE 0: GO TO 1980
1820 REM Out of Time
1830 INK 2: PAPER 5: BORDER 5: CLS
1840 CIRCLE 125,100,50
1850 PLOT 125,100: DRAW -30,0
1860 PLOT 125,100: DRAW -6,45
1870 RESTORE 4700
1880 READ tempo
1890 FOR i=1 TO 12
1900 GO SUB 2050
1910 IF i/2=INT (i/2) THEN OVER 1: PLOT
125,100: DRAW -7+(i/2),45: PLOT 125,100:
DRAW -6+(i/2),45
```

```
1920 NEXT i

1930 OVER 0

1940 PRINT AT 20,0;"You ran out of time!
The Editor will not be very happy with
you!"

1950 PAUSE 0

1970 CLS

1980 PRINT AT 21,0;"Another game? "

1990 IF INKEY$="y" THEN RESTORE 4230: GO TO
2210

2000 IF INKEY$="n" THEN GO TO 9999

2010 GO TO 1990

2050 READ a,b

2060 IF a<0 THEN PAUSE ABS a*tempo*50: GO
TO 2080

2070 BEEP a*tempo,b

2080 RETURN

2099 REM initialisation

2100 DIM a$(672)

2120 LET b$="\a"

2129 REM graphic J

2130 DIM h$(32): DIM i$(32): FOR i=1 TO 32:
LET h$(i)="\j": NEXT i

2140 LET n5=.25: LET n3=n5/2: LET n1=n3/2:
LET n7=n5*2: LET n9=n7*2

2150 LET n0=n1/4

2160 LET n4=n3+n1

2170 FOR i=0 TO 103

2180 READ a

2190 POKE USR "a"+i,a

2200 NEXT i

2210 BORDER 0: PAPER 0: INK 7: CLS

2220 REM 3 x Graphic Inverse 8 (block),
space, block, space, block, space, 3
blocks, space, three blocks, space, three
blocks, space, block, 2 spaces, block

2230 PRINT AT 3,3;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8"
```

```
2240 REM block, 3 spaces, block, space,
block, space, block, space, block, 2
spaces, block, 2 spaces, block, 3 spaces,
block, space, block

2250 PRINT AT 4,3;"\shift+8   \shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8  \shift+8
\shift+8   \shift+8 \shift+8"

2260 REM 3 blocks, space, 3 blocks, space,
2 blocks, 3 spaces, block, space, 3 blocks,
space, 2 blocks

2270 PRINT AT 5,3;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8 \shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8  \shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8"

2280 REM 2 spaces, block, space, block,
space, block, space, block, space, block, 2
spaces, block, 2 spaces, block, 2 spaces,
block, space, block

2290 PRINT AT 6,3;"  \shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8  \shift+8
\shift+8   \shift+8 \shift+8"

2300 REM 3 blocks, space, block, space,
block, space, block, space, block, space, 3
blocks, space, 3 blocks, space, block, 2
spaces, block

2310 PRINT AT 7,3;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8"

2320 INK 2

2330 REM 3 blocks, space, 3 blocks, space,
block, 2 spaces, 3 blocks, space, 3 blocks

2340 PRINT AT
10,5;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8  \shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8"

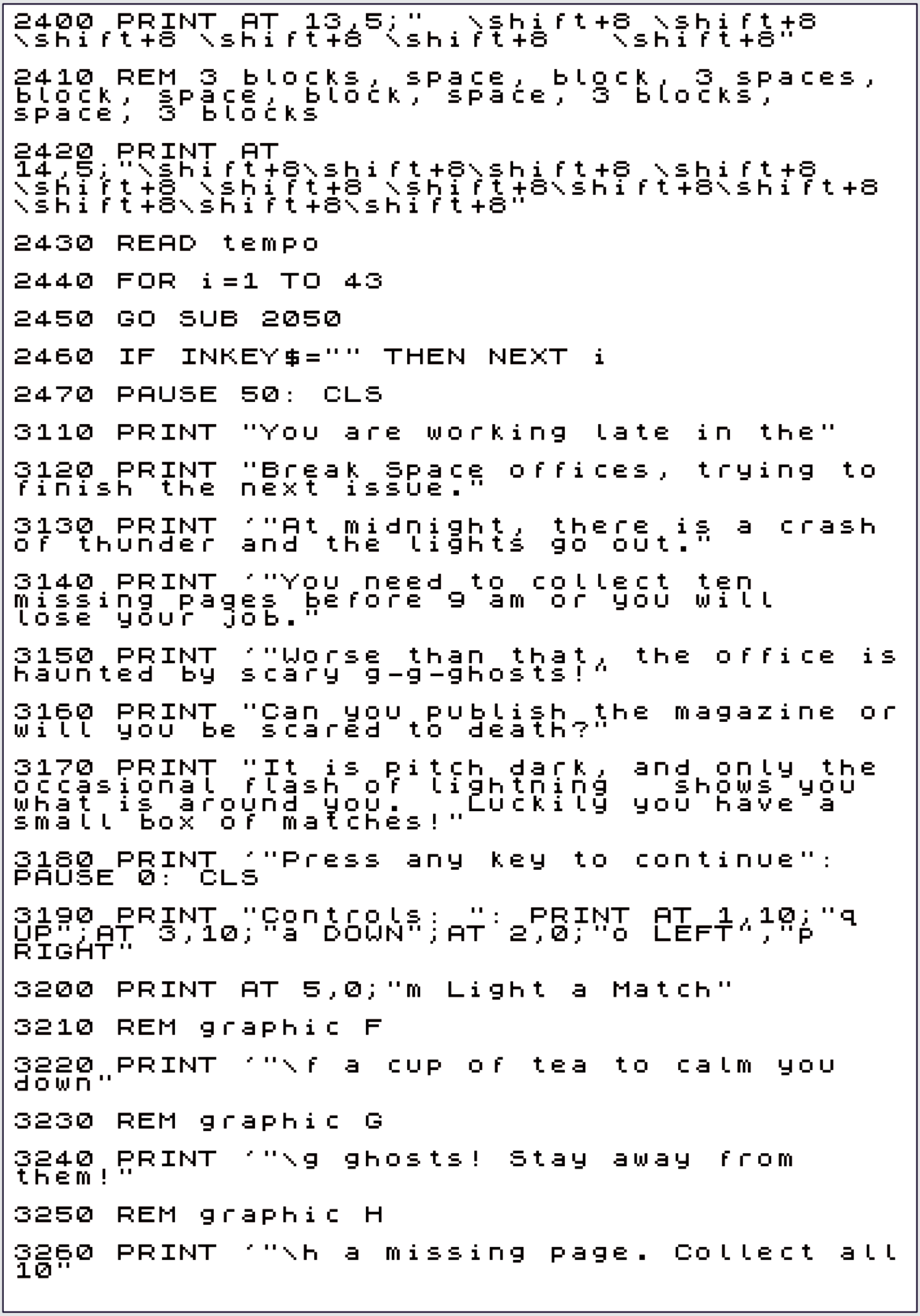
2350 REM block, 3 spaces, block, space,
block, space, block, space, block, space,
block, 3 spaces, block

2360 PRINT AT 11,5;"\shift+8   \shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8"

2370 REM 3 blocks, space, 3 blocks, space,
3 blocks, space, block, 3 spaces, 3 blocks

2380 PRINT AT
12,5;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8"

2390 REM 2 spaces, block, space, block, 3
spaces, block, space, block, space, block,
3 spaces, block
```



```
2400 PRINT AT 13,5;"  \shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8   \shift+8"

2410 REM 3 blocks, space, block, 3 spaces,
block, space, block, space, 3 blocks,
space, 3 blocks

2420 PRINT AT
14,5;"\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8 \shift+8
\shift+8 \shift+8 \shift+8\shift+8\shift+8
\shift+8\shift+8\shift+8"

2430 READ tempo

2440 FOR i=1 TO 43

2450 GO SUB 2050

2460 IF INKEY$="" THEN NEXT i

2470 PAUSE 50: CLS

3110 PRINT "You are working late in the"

3120 PRINT "Break Space offices, trying to
finish the next issue."

3130 PRINT '"At midnight, there is a crash
of thunder and the lights go out."

3140 PRINT '"You need to collect ten
missing pages before 9 am or you will
lose your job."

3150 PRINT '"Worse than that, the office is
haunted by scary g-g-ghosts!"

3160 PRINT "Can you publish the magazine or
will you be scared to death?"

3170 PRINT "It is pitch dark, and only the
occasional flash of lightning   shows you
what is around you.   Luckily you have a
small box of matches!"

3180 PRINT '"Press any key to continue":
PAUSE 0: CLS

3190 PRINT "Controls: ": PRINT AT 1,10;"q
UP";AT 3,10;"a DOWN";AT 2,0;"o LEFT","p
RIGHT"

3200 PRINT AT 5,0;"m Light a Match"

3210 REM graphic F

3220 PRINT '"\f a cup of tea to calm you
down"

3230 REM graphic G

3240 PRINT '"\g ghosts! Stay away from
them!"

3250 REM graphic H

3260 PRINT '"\h a missing page. Collect all
10"
```

```
3270 REM graphic \i

3280 PRINT '"\i a candle to light your way"

3290 PRINT '"Press any key to start": PAUSE
0: CLS

3300 BORDER 0: PAPER 0: INK 0: FLASH 0: CLS

3310 RANDOMIZE 0

3320 FOR i=0 TO 31: PRINT PAPER 5;AT
0,i;"#";AT 20,i;"#": NEXT i

3330 FOR i=0 TO 19: PRINT PAPER 5;AT
i,0;"#";AT i,31;"#": NEXT i

3340 FOR i=1 TO 20

3350 LET x=INT (RND*27+2): LET y=INT
(RND*17+2): IF ATTR (y,x)>=64 THEN GO TO
3350

3359 REM space, graphic G, space, then 3
spaces, then 3 spaces

3360 PRINT AT y,x-1; BRIGHT 1; INK 2;" \g
";AT y-1,x-1; BRIGHT 1;"   ";AT y+1,x-1;
BRIGHT 1;"   "

3370 NEXT i

3380 LET cx=INT (RND*30+1): LET cy=INT
(RND*19+1): IF ATTR (cy,cx)>=64 THEN GO TO
3380

3389 REM graphic F

3390 PRINT AT cy,cx; INK 6;"\f"

3400 LET lx=INT (RND*30+1): LET ly=INT
(RND*19+1): IF ATTR (ly,lx)>=64 THEN GO TO
3400

3409 REM graphic i

3410 PRINT AT ly,lx; INK 4;"\i"

3420 FOR i=1 TO 10

3430 LET x=INT (RND*29+1): LET y=INT
(RND*19+1): IF ATTR (y,x)>0 THEN GO TO 3430

3439 REM graphic H

3440 PRINT AT y,x; INK 3; FLASH 1;"\h"

3450 NEXT i

3459 REM make yourself braver by increasing
this to 12

3460 LET brave=8

3470 LET matches=8: LET candle=0

3480 LET light=6

3490 LET pages=0
```

```
3500 LET hb=0
3510 LET hh=0: LET mm=0
3520 LET x=INT (RND*29+1): LET y=INT
 (RND*19+1): IF ATTR (y,x)>0 THEN GO TO 3520
3530 PRINT AT 0,0; INK 0; PAPER 8; BRIGHT
8; FLASH 8; OVER 1;a$
3540 GO TO 100
3999 REM user defined graphics
4000 DATA 0,24,24,126,24,60,36,36
4010 DATA 0,24,88,60,26,56,72,8
4020 DATA 0,24,26,60,88,28,18,16
4030 DATA 0,24,90,60,24,28,18,16
4040 DATA 0,24,24,60,90,24,36,68
4050 DATA 56,68,127,125,125,127,124,56
4060 DATA 0,28,62,42,62,62,42,0
4070 DATA 0,126,66,82,74,82,66,126
4080 DATA 16,56,56,56,56,56,254,124
4090 DATA 0,0,0,0,0,255,0,0
4100 DATA 0,0,0,48,72,135,0,0
4110 DATA 80,80,136,136,136,5,5,2
4120 DATA 0,0,0,0,32,32,80,80
4129 REM Bach Toccata in Fugue
4230 DATA 2.5,n3/3,21,n3/3,19,n3/3,21
4240 DATA -(n0),0
4250 DATA n0,19,n0,17,n0,16,n0,14,n1/2,13
4260 DATA n1,14
4270 DATA -n1,0
4280 DATA -n3,0
4290 DATA n3/3,9,n3/3,7,n3/3,9
4300 DATA -(n1/2),0
4310 DATA n1/2,4
4320 DATA n1/2,5
4330 DATA n1/2,1
4340 DATA n1,2
4350 DATA -n1,0
```

```
4360 DATA -n3,0
4370 DATA n3/3,-3,n3/3,-5,n3/3,-3
4380 DATA -(n1/2),0
4390 DATA n0,-5,n0,-7,n0,-8,n0,-10,n1/2,-11
4400 DATA n1,-10
4410 DATA -n1,0
4420 DATA -n3,0
4430 DATA n5,-11
4440 DATA n5,-8
4450 DATA n5,-5
4460 DATA n5,-2
4470 DATA n5,1
4480 DATA n7,4
4490 DATA n1,-5
4500 DATA n1,-8
4510 DATA n3,-6
4600 REM FUNERAL MARCH
4610 DATA 2,n5,-2,n4,-2,n1,-2,n7,-2
4620 DATA n5,-2,n4,-2,n1,-2,n7,-2
4630 DATA n5,-2,n4,-2,n1,-2,n5,-2,n4,1,n1,0
4640 DATA n4,0,n1,-2,n4,-2,n1,-2,n7,-2
4700 REM Countdown
4710 DATA 1.2,n1,14,n1,12,-n3,0,n1,7,n1,9,-n3,0
4720 DATA n1,15,n1,17,n1,14,n1,17,-n5,0
4730 DATA n3,-10
9999 BORDER 7: INK 0: PAPER 7: OVER 0: CLS
```

Gunman Messiah

Krappygamez

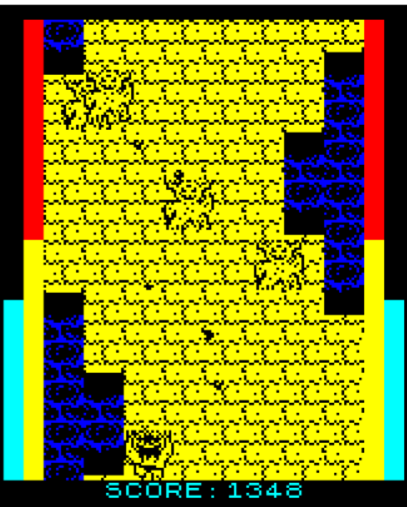
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44492

Free

This takes me back.

Back to oh, I dunno, 1987 or so, when I found myself at a schoolfriend's* house helping write a shoot-em-up with the C64 SEUCK utility. It was called Universal Pacifist, and featuring a robed messaniac character blazing out crucifixes at evil-doers. We never finished it, but it turns out we didn't have to. We just had to wait 38 years for Krappygamez to do it.

The plot here is nice and simple - the Messiah has returned to Earth, as promised, and has his work cut out cleaning up the demon-haunted world. Not in a Sagan sense, either : there are legit demons, damned souls and the ubiquitous flying skulls all over the place, all fodder for the Son of God's mighty cannon (insert Frankie Howard noise here).



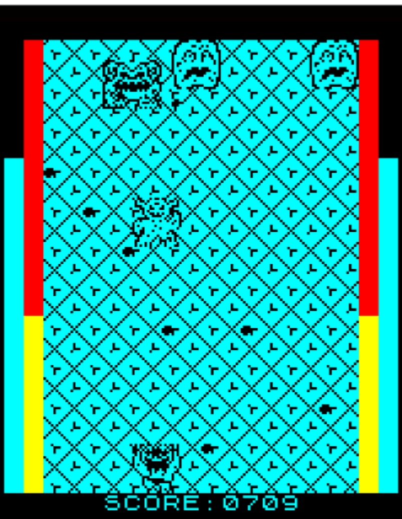
James 2:19

Your guns appear to have miraculously infinite ammo at first, as you can hold down Space to summon a literal bullet hell for your enemies. But there's an energy bar, clearly framing the play area. The yellow bar drains down swiftly, as which point your shots switch from a screen-wide fan of justice to a narrower stream of penance. If the secondary red bar drains, even that gives out and you need to take some time to reflect as your firepower recharges. You will find that rapid tapping is much more efficient. Proverbs 21:20, you see.

So you need to ration your shots, pausing to power up between waves, sometimes ignoring a buildup of enemies as you wait for full power. It's clever, if blasphemous, stuff.

Technically this is very impressive, with screen-filling numbers of large sprites moving about, while dozens of bullets flit past at blistering pace. It's also rather difficult - while you are dispensing bullets like loaves at Bethsaida, the forces of evil are also crowding the play area with slower-moving projectiles of their own. Your not-quite-eternal-life chips away every time you fail to dodge one, and recovers very slowly. And you only get one life, which seems off-brand somehow. Matthew 26:52, I guess.

Not quite divine, but not one to cast out of your garden either.



Revelation 14:13

Gunman Messiah gives a whole new meaning to the term 'bullet hell'. Our hero looks like an Ikari Warrior (did they have names? Let's go with Barry) wearing a crown of thorns, but the other sprites have an unsettling quality redolent of 'Soft & Cuddly'.

The game's engine is impressive: a fast moving, colourful, vertically scrolling shooter with bosses, loads of masked sprites and bullets everywhere. So many bullets in fact, that they become hard to see and almost impossible to avoid. Nevertheless, making all this happen in the 16K's contented memory is quite an achievement.

The naturally recovering health and firepower are great ideas, but they need a bit of refinement. This is my way of saying the game is too hard. We reviewers seem to be saying that a lot these days—maybe we've gone soft. I suspect not in this case though, as the author has hidden a sacred cheat message in the code, for anyone that cares to decipher its arcane libretto of bytes. Failing that you could just open it in a text editor.

---

*Hi Shanel

Sanxion - the Spectrum Remix

Thalamus Digital

https://thalamusdigital.itch.io/sanxion-the-spectrum-remix-zx-spectrum

$1

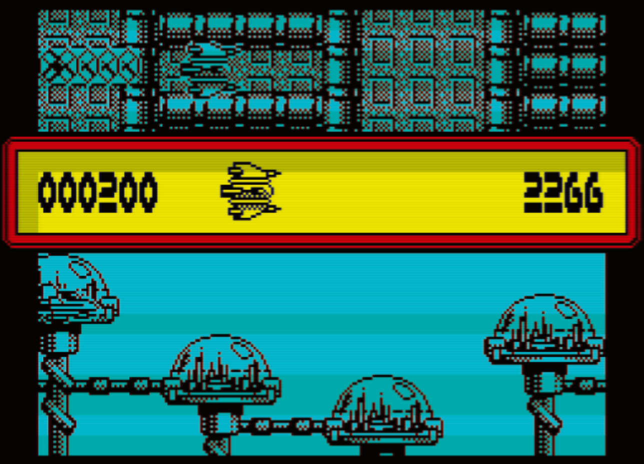
Another Commodore C64 game that I know pretty well, and another re-release from Thalamus Digital Publishing Ltd. This new edition has a beautifully pixelated loading screen from Jarrod “BinMan” Bentley (who did the original screen, by the way). On loading, the title screen states, somberly, “For Oliver and Roger”, being Oliver Frey and Roger Kean respectively, two colossii in magazine publishing, Oli for his excellent art work and magazine cover illustrations, and Roger for launching many loved computer games magazines from the 1980s. Both are sadly no longer with us, and may they rest in peace.

You get two main versions for your money: the 48K iteration has a good beeper rendition of an original Rob Hubbard score (present in AY form if you load the 128K version), but is missing the high score table, a scrolly text on the title screen, and another chip tune played on the high score table of its big brother. The music is done by maestro Wally Beben, and done well. I’ll admit that I think I prefer the beeper version over the AY.

It’s a horizontally scrolling 2D blaster, but unlike some others, you’re given two views to consider; at the bottom is the main game viewing window, in which you move up and down, forwards (to about half way across the screen), and backwards. This is where you’ll need to line your ship up with the oncoming waves of Alien scrum to obliterate them. An early warning is given in the top bit of the screen (as this portion sees more of what is ahead and behind you than the main play area). Very handy when an enemy wave is heading at you from behind.

Whilst your firepower is sufficient, it can be upgraded, should you obtain the powerups, helpfully marked with a “P”. Other than this, assume that everything is trying to kill you, but it is not possible to destroy everything; either you don’t have enough time to, or some of the waves do not dissipate once shot.

This is very much a pattern learning and memory game, though some waves shoot back, and whilst these shot patterns can be learnt, it isn’t predictable. Spend enough time, and have a little patience, and you’ll soon be smashing through each level. Sanxion is well done, but it’s lacking is due to the source material not being great. There is enough of a game here though, especially good if you are nostalgic for the original Speccy release from 1989.



I’m sure the later levels look great too

I don't want you guys thinking I'm a wuss or something but Hell's teeth, when you get the “Prepare for Death” message before each game it ain't kidding. Shaun is bang on the money when he says it's a pattern learning game and the pattern I learned was to die repeatedly.

This isn't a game I played back in the day, even though I was a shoot em up fan. That's possibly because it was released late in the Speccy's life when I had one eye on the 16-bits or maybe because it is nigh on impossible to pronounce. I mean, “Sanxion”, I ask you, what sort of word is that? Given that I bought many of my games from Boots, I'd probably end up going home with a treatment for hemorrhoids or something.

Speaking of things that are a pain in the backside; after getting my posterior well and truly tanned by every single enemy wave, I had a few goes at the original to see if it was any less punishing and nope, it's every bit as brutal.

The game has all the hallmarks of a late Speccy full price release: the graphics are superb; the sound is top notch and there's certainly a sense of achievement when you finally get past a particularly annoying wave of baddies.

Ultimately though that happened for me all too seldomly, I am however only too happy to recommend this game to masochists and hardcore shoot ‘em up fans with plenty of patience.

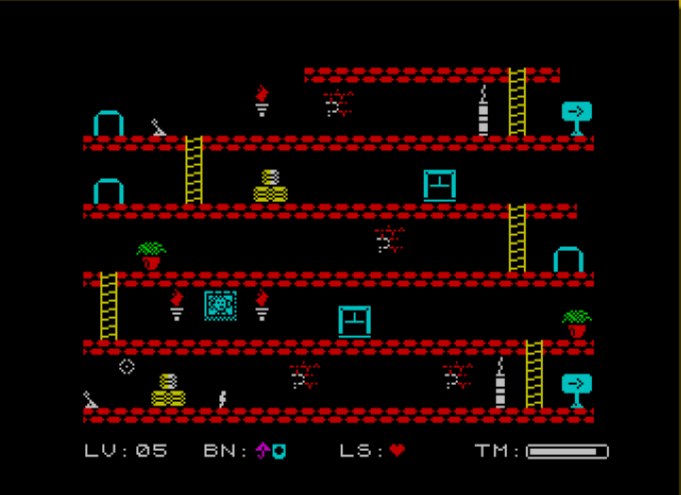
DS Bodyguard

S.E. Ivanov

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44488

Free

Remember when Disney released ‘worker ant saves colony flick’ “A Bug's Life” around the same time as DreamWorks released ‘worker ant saves colony flick’ “Antz”? Well something similar seems to have happened in the Spectrum scene.



It’s a long way to the top if you wanna Rock’n’Roll

Having literally just played and reviewed “Little John Can't Jump”, a game where you interact with the scenery to ensure a little man makes it to safety, the very next game to be booted up on my ZX Spectrum was S.E. Ivanov’s “DS Bodyguard”, a game where you interact with the scenery to ensure a little man makes it to safety. What are the chances?

This time round, rather than selecting icons, Lemmings style, you play the role of a sniper, taking out obstacles in our little guy's path as well as shooting signs that change the direction of travel of our diminutive hero.

Knowing what to shoot and why takes a bit of getting used to. There are gunmen that appear from doorways, weights that fall from windows, arrows that shoot from the sides and various other nasties as you progress through the levels. To help you out there are some handy power ups that provide you with goodies like extra lives or extra time.

When you notice a bonus item appearing, you then face the dilemma of choosing to risk leaving your little man exposed ( ), or forgoing the power ups to concentrate on the hazards.

Picking the wrong option can be pretty costly as your crosshair moves at a pace that would make a snail think “come on chap, move it along a bit”. If you're on the wrong side of the screen when danger strikes, then it's curtains for the wee fella.

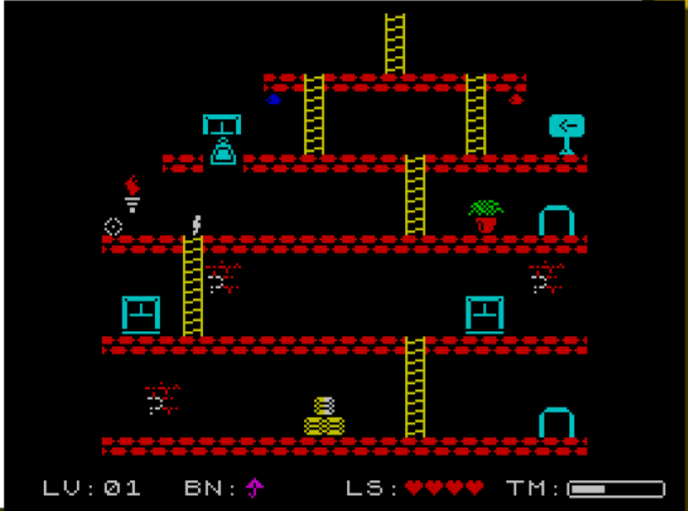
This can lead to some levels being a bit of a memory test, as you hover over the danger zones in anticipation, keeping one step ahead of those who wish to do your charge harm.

Once you get your bearings, it is quite straightforward to power your way through the levels though, the learning curve certainly doesn't seem as steep as similar games.

The graphics are nice and colourful in an old school Speccy kinda way and the music is very fitting too, it seems designed to add a bit of tension to proceedings and it works.

Overall it's another solid entry in the Yandex 2025 comp and well worth checking out.

Finally I must mention a unique touch in the menu screen which has a “memories” option. Here the programmer has listed some of their inspirations in making the game, which I thought was very sweet and confirmed my suspicion that this game was made with love.

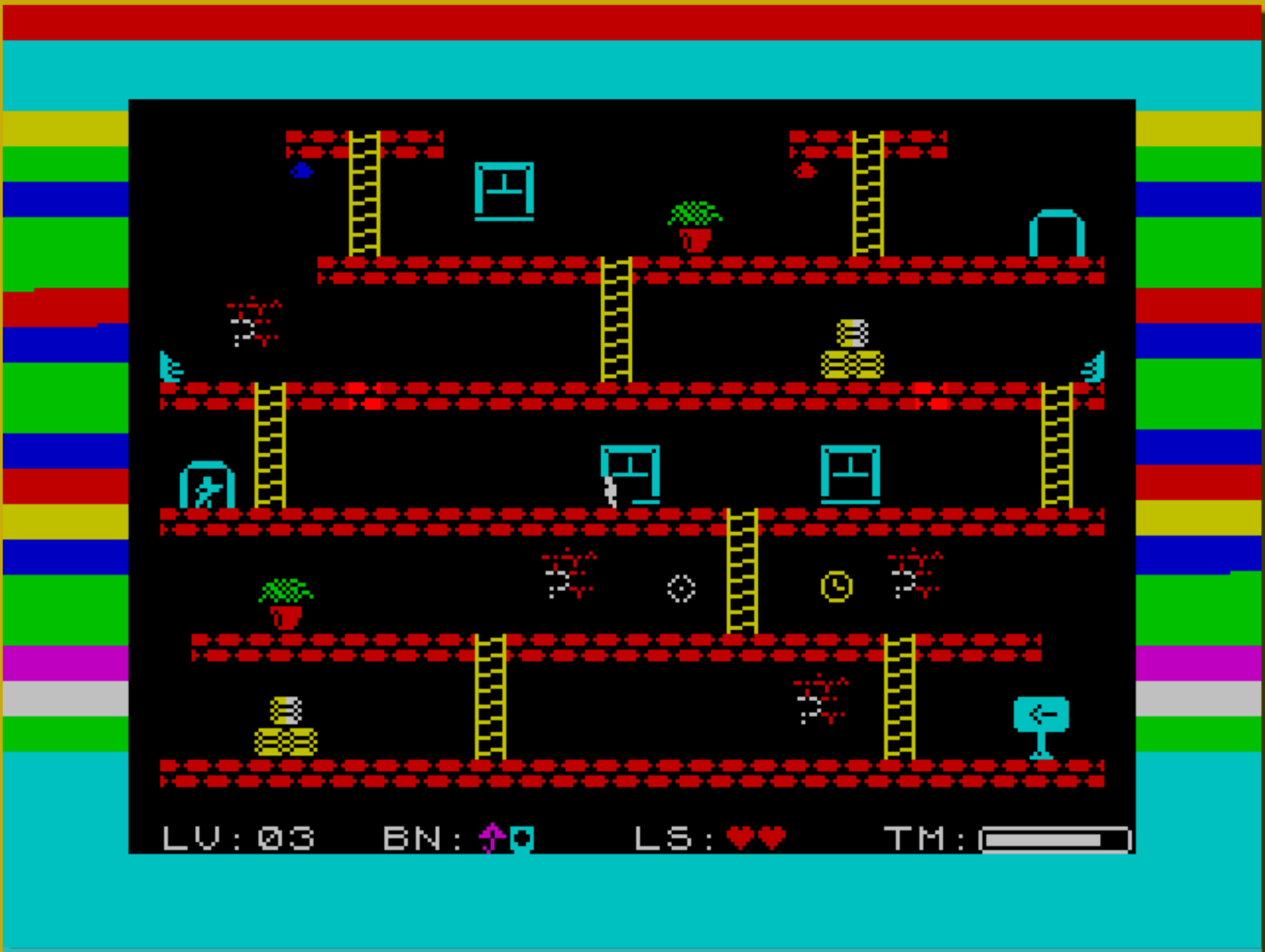


Watch out for that Anvil!

DS Bodyguard might have some things that are initially easy to dislike, but to do so is to miss out on a game with plenty to love. Yes, it's effectively a memory game — you really can't react in time to move your cursor fast enough unless you already know where the lethal targets are going to appear. But that "you just need to learn how to do each level" approach could just as easily be levelled at Flashback (1992), and people loved that. Once I accepted that "flaw", the game won me over with its many charms: the animation of shooters slowly drawing their guns, the main character wiggling his bum as he climbs a ladder one square at a time, the crosshair flashing when it's over something (whether scenery or target) that would it otherwise obscure, and even the option to mute the rather frantic music.

Incidentally, on the menu screen the author is credited as S.E. Ivanov (Delta Squad). I wonder if that's where the "DS" in the title comes from. Or perhaps it was once envisaged as a Nintendo DS game, making use of its touch screen (which would be a neat fit). Personally, I prefer the idea that we play as Mr. Bodyguard, whose nominative determinism has shaped his career in the police force, leading him to rise to the rank of Detective Sergeant.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my time with this game. And, as Sloany mentioned, the list of inspirations (or "memories") is a lovely touch, and it's likely to appeal to anyone with similarly fond recollections of those titles.



Sniped!

Tower of Mystery

TheShich

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44567

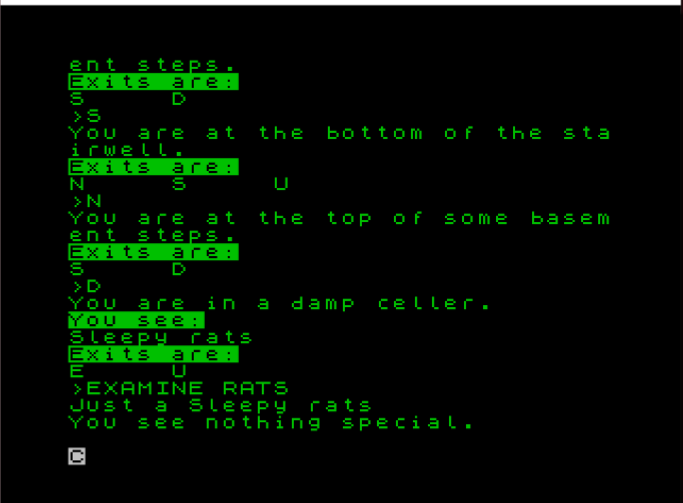
Free

Time for a little history lesson. No, come back! It's about computer games and it's fascinating, honest. Sort of.

So, back in 1984, Compute! Publications published a book called COMPUTE!'s Guide to Adventure Games*, really sticking with that '!'. It was a guide to playing and writing text adventure games, with musings about the development of the form from roots in D&D through early titles like Adventure, Zork and proto-AI language models like Eliza.

It takes a crack at reviewing all the major games released to that point, from Infocom, Scott Adams, Sierra Online and others, and has a general section about how to play the games, including a bit about how mazes work, which has always remained a mystery to me.

Then, crucially for this review, the book closed out with a type-in BASIC script, to use with a variety of computers. Apple, Atari, Assorted Commodores, IBM PCs, TRS-80, TI-99…all manner of American 8-bits. No Speccy, of course, and so it remained until now. TheShich has proudly converted the BASIC to superior Spectrum BASIC and released it for our little rubbery pal.



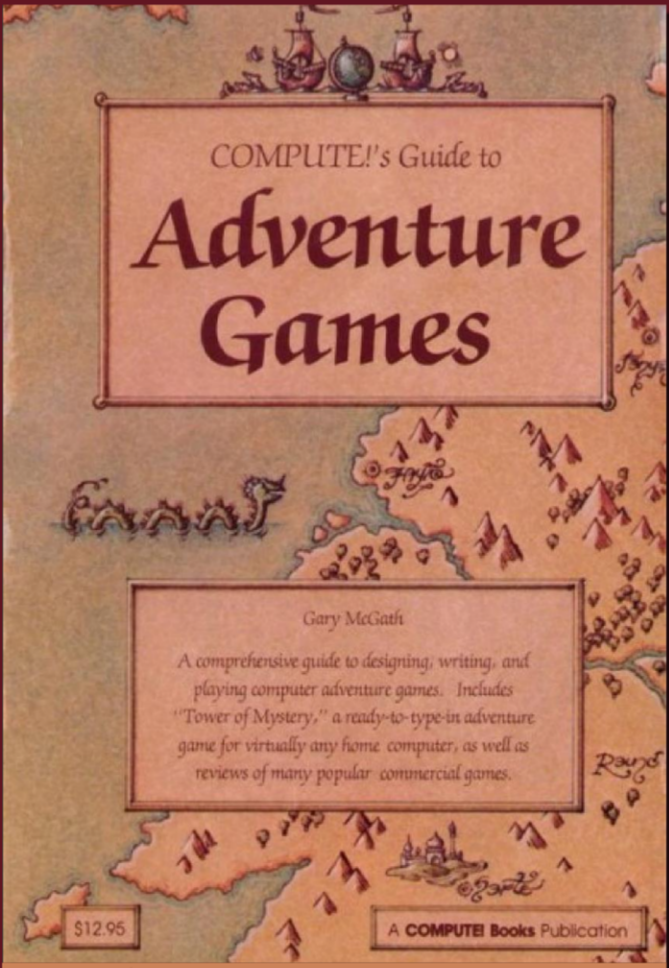
```
ent steps.
Exits are:
S     D
>S
You are at the bottom of the sta
irwell.
Exits are:
N     S     U
>N
You are at the top of some basem
ent steps.
Exits are:
S     D
>D
You are in a damp celler.
You see:
Sleepy rats
Exits are:
E     U
>EXAMINE RATS
Just a Sleepy rats
You see nothing special.

C
```

D'awww! Sleepy likkle guys.

As a game, it's fairly rudimentary, which was kind of the point. The plot sees you at the threshold of an abandoned building, tasked with finding and retrieving the only remaining copy of Crowther & Woods' original Adventure program. I guess they need a proper archive site like SpectrumComputing.

There are a handful of rooms, a few puzzles, some of which even make sense, and a very attainable ending.



COMPUTE!'s Guide to

Adventure Games

Gary McGath

A comprehensive guide to designing, writing, and playing computer adventure games. Includes "Tower of Mystery," a ready-to-type-in adventure game for virtually any home computer, as well as reviews of many popular commercial games.

$12.95

A COMPUTE! Books Publication

$12.95 was a lot back in 1984

As a learning tool, it's an interesting insight into early design, but maybe you'd be better off learning Inform or PAW if you want to roll your own epic.

Mostly though, it's a little slice of the early days imported fresh to the Spectrum world. Valuable in its own way, more than the sum of its parts.

Tower of Mystery is a decent enough introduction to playing and coding text adventures. It has an evocative setting, simple puzzles, sarky responses to bad input, and most important of all—an annoying case of guess the verb. *(I dunno, I got a kick out of it - Ed)*

Sinclair BASIC's lack of MID$ and ON commands required the most rewiring, but line numbers generally correspond and read similarly, give or take a few LETs and GOTOs. It's certainly not a simple cut & paste job though. TheShich has done a great job converting it. They've added colour, some funnier responses, and even streamlined some of the string handling to bring the code in at 7K. It's great to see the Spectrum finally get a version of this old classic.

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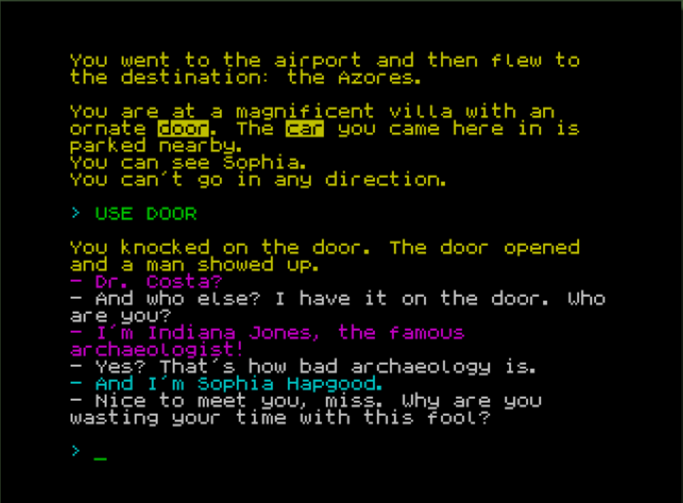
*https://archive.org/details/Compute_s_Guide_to_Adventure_Games/mode/1up?view=theater

Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis

Kamil Blažek

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44498

Free



```
You went to the airport and then flew to
the destination: the Azores.

You are at a magnificent villa with an
ornate door. The car you came here in is
parked nearby.
You can see Sophia.
You can´t go in any direction.

> USE DOOR

You knocked on the door. The door opened
and a man showed up.
- Dr. Costa?
- And who else? I have it on the door. Who
are you?
- I´m Indiana Jones, the famous
archaeologist!
- Yes? That´s how bad archaeology is.
- And I´m Sophia Hapgood.
- Nice to meet you, miss. Why are you
wasting your time with this fool?

> _
```

Everyone’s a critic

Ah, Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis. An unconventional text adventure, mostly for the wrong reasons.

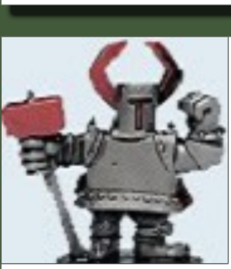
You start next to your car, so I tried to get in. The game responded with, “You’re going in.” Whoo-hoo! I thought, only to find myself in a library. I quickly threw aside my cognitive dissonance and focused steadfastly on remaining in the "fictive dream," like a man who has eyed an ancient foreign relic he plans on stealing for the British Museum.

A library, you say? Just my kind of place. I’m an archaeologist, after all—a man of learning. In the library are some people looking for an idol. I check my pockets and, lo and behold, I’m carrying one. Unquestioningly, I hand it over. A man takes it, finds a hidden ‘bead’ inside, and declares that both the bead and the idol are now his. To be honest, I thought it was his already! But now that he’s stealing what I gave him freely, I’m furious.

In a fashion uncharacteristic of the real Indy, I react too slowly. The man flees. Where? I know not. But the library has only one exit. That doesn’t help - the man has gotten away. I’m back on the street in front of my car. I turn to my own reflection in the driver's window and say, “Quick, I must find the lost city of Atlantis!”

Are you confused? I was a little. I don’t like to provide spoilers for text adventures, but I hope this gives you a little flavour of the game and it’s little quirks. The text and dialogue can be a little abrupt, but I was able to follow the story, even if I had to re-read certain passages. Rather helpfully, you can type VOCAB to get a list of usable words. The list isn't overwhelmingly long, which is a blessing; the challenge lies not in guessing the right verb, but in figuring out the game's specific logic for using them. You're spared the frustration of stabbing in the dark with complex synonyms, but you must be mindful that the game has its rough edges. Your commands will work, but often not quite how you intended.

Thematically, the game is gripping. Right from the off, Indy is hurled into high-action mystery with a plot that made me want to keep playing and look past the unconventional aspects of the game's design. If Fate of Atlantis were a fedora, I’d certainly risk a severe crush injury to my right arm to retrieve it while escaping an Inca burial tomb I’d just robbed. Eh, well, maybe!



Bad Dates! That’ s my favourite Indy bit. That monkey deserved it.

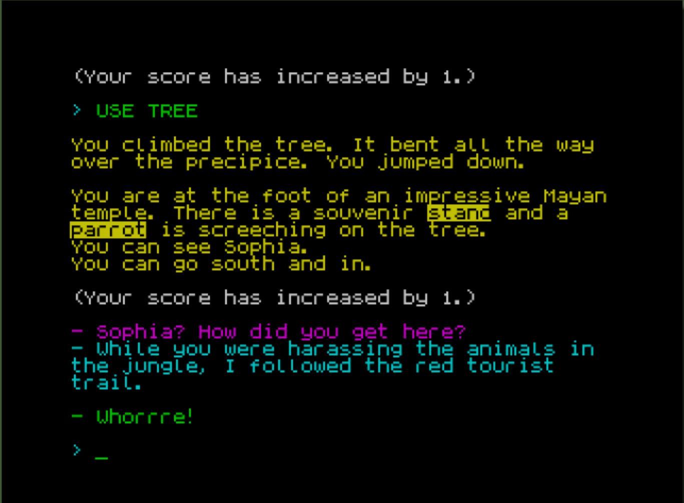
Much of the quirkiness Jamie mentions is due to the game translating sometimes lengthy visual cut-scenes into a few lines of text. A tricky task, but I feel like the game gets most of it right.

The VOCAB option is a great one, which every game should consider, but there are some oddities to offset that. ‘L’ has been LOOK in every game since 1984, but here it’s LOAD, and basically neccessitates a restart. Bummer.

But starting with the advantage of a minor classic Lucasarts plot structure and puzzle design is not nothin’, and that helps this implementation slide under the descending doorway of its occasional idiosyncracies.

It moves along from location to location with whip-sharp pace, and puzzles that won’t leave you stuck for long. A fun exercise, in all.

Also, there’s an *incredibly* rude parrot.



```
(Your score has increased by 1.)

> USE TREE

You climbed the tree. It bent all the way
over the precipice. You jumped down.

You are at the foot of an impressive Mayan
temple. There is a souvenir stand and a
parrot is screeching on the tree.
You can see Sophia.
You can go south and in.

(Your score has increased by 1.)

- Sophia? How did you get here?
- While you were harassing the animals in
the jungle, I followed the red tourist
trail.

- Whorrre!

> _
```

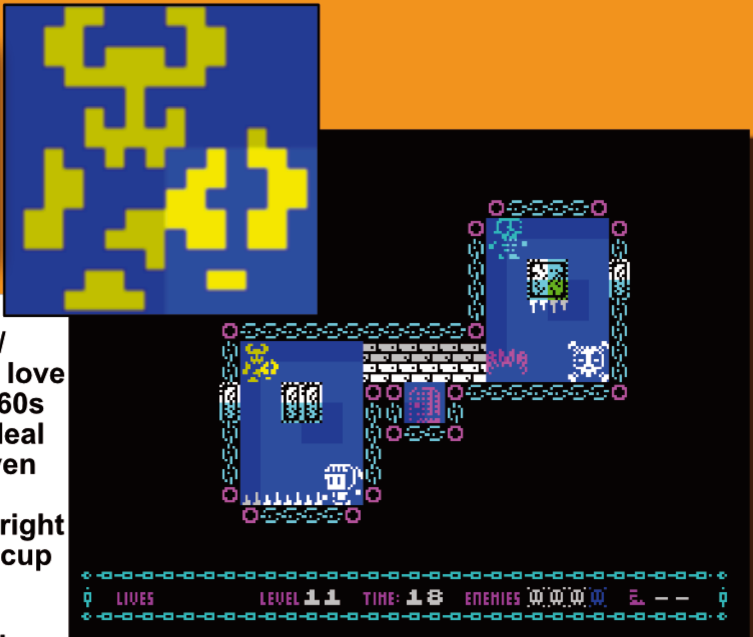
Polly, out of pocket.

Escape from the Twilight Castle

Miguetelo

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44489

Free



Ed? Is that you?

This is exactly my kinda game, being a weird Universal Monsters/ Monster Mash/Elvira sort of guy. I love the monster craze of the 50s and 60s and Halloween is a much bigger deal in my house than Christmas or even my birthday. So suffice it to say playing spooky themed games is right up my street, in my front door and I'm making it a cup of tea and offering it a cigarette.

The gameplay is a new one on me: baddies move in the opposite direction to you, so you move up, they move down, you move right, they move left and so on. This means that if you choose the right path you can steer them into a death square and get the key to let you out of the room/level. I've never seen this type of game before but I know for sure you are screaming it at me right now. Bit louder, I didn't catch it… bit more… nope, I just remembered the laws of physics. Never mind. If it's been done before or not it's still a very interesting mechanic, and like McDonalds I'm loving it.

First it's quite straightforward, you move, they move. Then you figure out how to make them move so they hit the death square. Then you figure out if they have room to move and you don't even pushing in that direction against a wall will make them move. Thus you can subtly change where they are in relation to you, and that can sometimes make it possible to steer them into the death square. It's a classic game level design: teach the player the game play by a series of simple levels thereby making the much harder upper levels playable. It's a classic.

Visually the game, designed and built by Spanish developer Miguetelo, is beautifully done. The graphics are really well rendered, from the fabulous loading screen to the quirky animated skeletons, pumpkins and other spooky staples. The tone is perfect and it looks like a classic game that's been around for years.

The music too, being a 128 game, is excellent and sets the mood from the very start. I love, love, love 128 music, always have done. Is there a playlist of spooky AY tunes anywhere? I'd listen the shit out of that.

All things considered, it's a fun game and one that has hidden depths. Hidden to me as I only made it about 5-6 levels in before I outstripped my dumb luck and started to have to rely on skill. And that was on the EASY setting. So there's room for improvement and this is a game I will definitely come back to.

Ahhhh!! Another game that's rewiring my aging and barely functional grey matter! This one is a fun (fun!) puzzle game, and yet another in which our Champion is again a Knight; he (or she) is trapped and must destroy the Skeletons, Ghouls, Bats and other unsavoury characters, and once each of these is slain or otherwise removed from each level, a key is presented to collect. The prize is to escape to another dungeon-type setting to do it all again. Oh, and there's a time limit to contend with, and for those who like more of a challenge, one may choose to play through this on extra difficult where you have a limited number of moves to finish each dungeon.

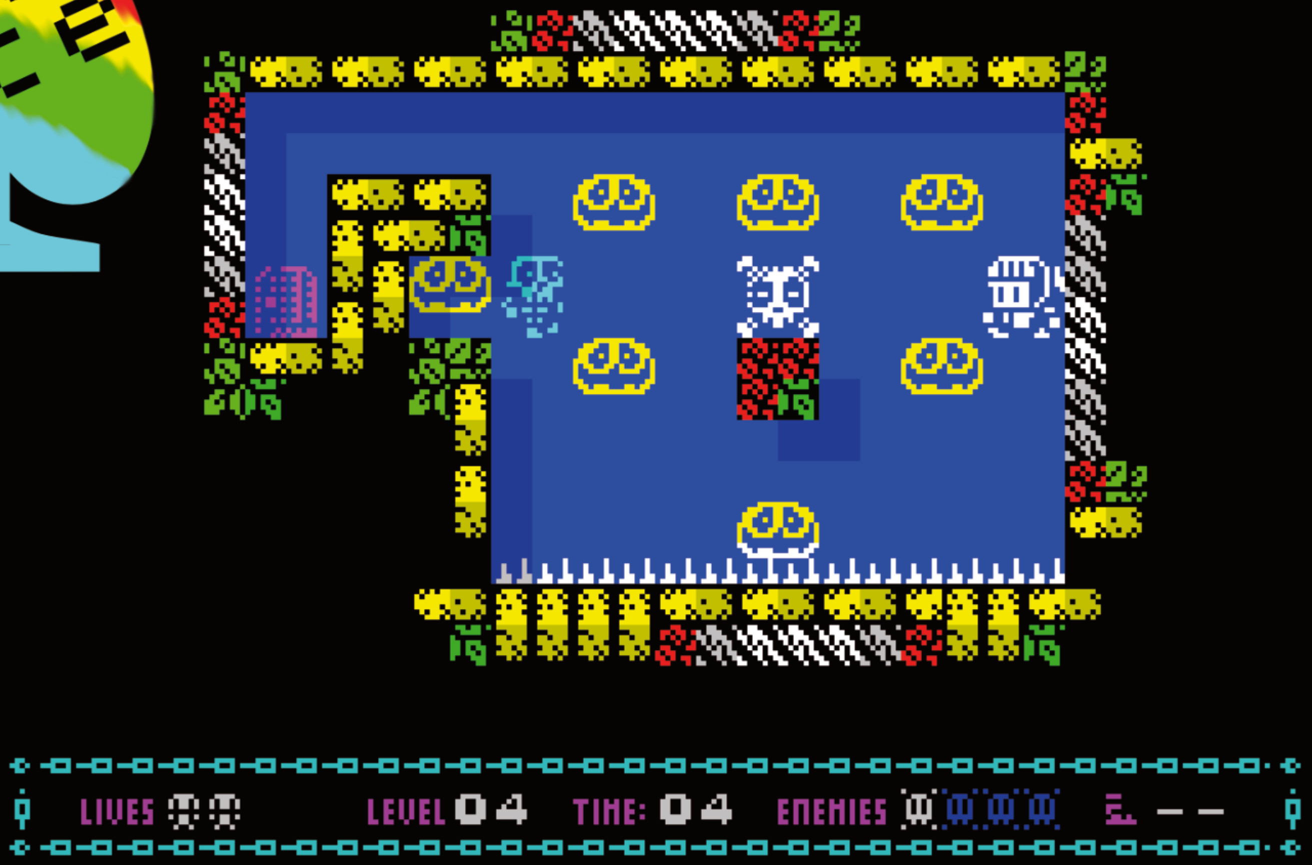
It kind of hurts my brain having one or more things to concentrate on, I move left, one, two or more of my evil foes move right, so I have to safely move whilst being mindful that I could be making this particular level impossible to complete if I don't pay attention to everything.
I like the suitably atmospheric AY music, and the fact that there are multiple scores to listen to as you progress, and the graphics are well drawn and animated. Fun fact, on level 11, the game features our editorial overlord, Mpk! Crikes!
The best thing about this production, though, is the gameplay. Having nice presentation and graphics is one thing, but Miguetelo has nailed the playability here for sure. Beware of the continues though, as anything other than pressing the y key will see you back at the title screen (my instinct is always to press the fire button or action key to continue). In fact, that's my only complaint in what is an excellent and well made puzzle epic.

It feels like you could happily trace the lineage of Escape From The Twilight Castle right back to Sokoban (~1981) via the modern ZX Spectrum classic AlterEgo (2011, RetroSouls).

As Phil and Shaun both said, the presentation here is top notch, with lovely musical themes throughout, and there's a super clever puzzle game beneath the gloss. Each keypress you commit to really needs you to be fully aware of all the moving pieces – both those you have control of, and those which move under their own steam.

If anything, I think the inclusion of a timer for each level is probably unnecessary – the required thinking needed would be no less without it being there, and coupling this with the step-limit in 'hard' mode can make that more of an exercise in having learnt the 'correct' solution for levels and executing it within the allocated time frame.

If I'm nitpicking, I'd also like a little longer to digest the information screens that are displayed before the introduction of a new enemy. But honestly I'm really clutching at straws to find minor quibbles – this is an excellent addition to the ZX Spectrum puzzle game oeuvre.



The skeletons are…? Part of it! Any questions?

A brief history of puzzle games

Puzzles have existed for millennia, with early examples like riddles in ancient texts (e.g., the Sumerian riddle from 2000 BCE) and physical puzzles like the Chinese Tangram (circa 4th century CE). These tested logic and spatial reasoning. And in more modern times, puzzle games took various shapes: from the invention of the jigsaw puzzle in 1767, to those sliding tile type puzzles, which date back to 1874.

In our electronic and digital age, puzzle games are an ideal match for the computing power at our fingertips, and our human obsession with deliberately making things for our brains to solve has seen many good and great games on our screens. Even a humble ZX80 can run a form of the code-breaking board game Mastermind. (Invented by Mordechai Meirovitch and first marketed by Invicta Games in the UK in 1970, fact fans). Of the many released for our Speccy, Escape from the Twilight Castle is in good company, keeping this pastime very much alive on our 8-bit wonder machine.

Magenta Sky

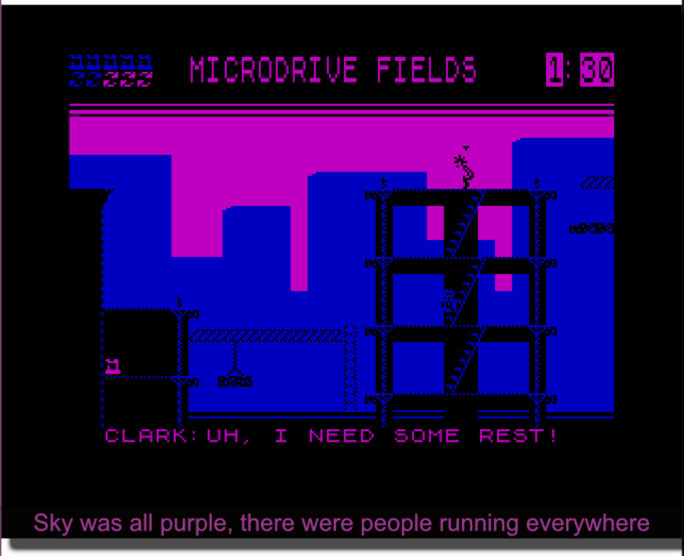
Radical Reflux

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44530

PWYW / $2

The hot colour of 2025 is clearly magenta. The third Spectrum Next Kickstarter has utterly smashed through its stretch goals. This was thanks in no small part to the canny idea of having a limited edition version bathed in what was no doubt the Artist Formerly Known as "the Artist Formerly Known as Prince"'s favourite Speccy hue.

Continuing the fuchsia theme and opening with a snazzy intro that takes up a whopping 34kb file, Radical Reflux's Magenta Sky is a collect 'em up platformer with a beautiful minimalist style. Set in a dystopian future with evil corporations and corrupt governments, you take on the role of luckless protagonist Clark as he fights back against the broken system.



CLARK: UH, I NEED SOME REST!

Sky was all purple, there were people running everywhere

Each level is set over a number of single screens in a similar fashion to Gilligan's Gold. The aim of the game is to collect microdrives to open portals to the next level.

In addition to the striking visuals, what helps this game stand out from its peers is the ability to press a button to give yourself a wee speed boost, Chase HQ style. These turbos are handy for getting you across large gaps and essential for beating the tight time limits on the later levels, but need to be used sparingly as they come at the expense of your heart rate. I really like how other than falls & enemies on the much later levels, most hazards won't kill you, they'll just zap your heart rate & slow you down as you regain your composure.

With up to jump, it can be a little fiddly trying to line yourself up to climb the stairs between platforms, which is particularly frustrating given the aforementioned time limits, but once you get the knack though you'll be zipping about outrunning those pesky pigeons, drones & agents in no time.

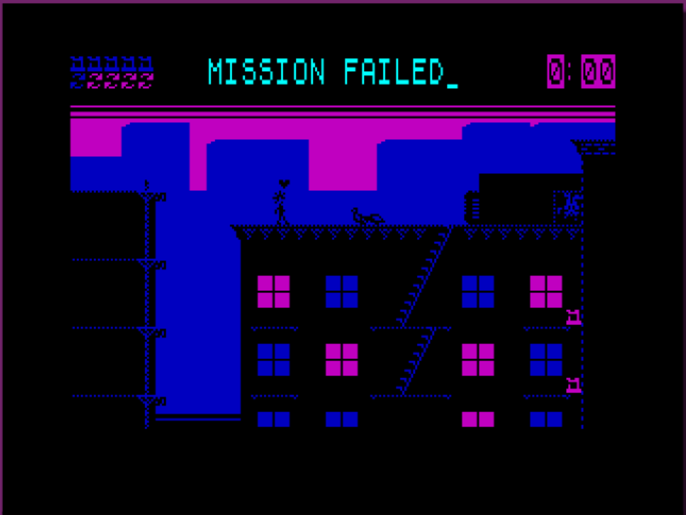
Sound effects are minimal, which is a shame as it's a game that deserves a funky soundtrack. That minor grievance aside, the story, graphical style and gameplay really drive you on and keep you coming back for more until you find out what happens to Clark. The Speccy scene's purple patch continues.

This is a game that doesn't need a soundtrack, really - just put on Purple Rain and party like it's 1984. 1999 isn't on Purple Rain, so you'll have to make do.

Anyway, what Magenta Sky does need is precision timing, patience and nerves of steel. (And maybe a password system to skip to later levels.) 'Up to jump' is always contentious, and I found myself falling afoul of finger confusion early on until I got the controls into my thick head. The Skool Daze-style stair system would be better served by seperate Up and Jump buttons, but of course we're hamstrung by the single-button joysticks that are standard on the Speccy. Honestly, one guy makes a stupid decision in 1982 and we're all still dealing with it.

The heart rate system is clever though, and balances nicely against the timer. Maybe your Morpheus-from-Matrix style mentor should have picked someone who's not a couch potato. I mostly died from falls anyway.

Other than that - this is pretty great. It's got a unique, stylish look, a Cyberpunk story ripped straight from the (1984) headlines, and smartly designed levels that keep you on your toes and ramp up the difficulty nicely as you progress.



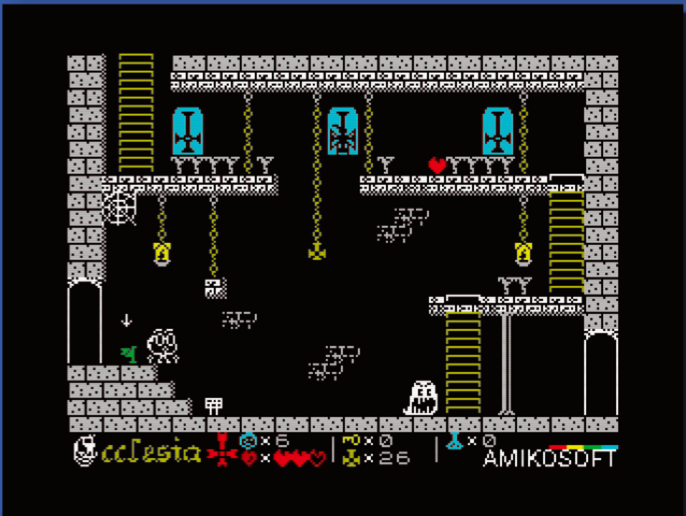
Party over, Oops : Outta time.

Ecclesia

Amikoes

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44536

PWYW / €3



Big eyes? Or Iris Apfel's glasses?

Platform games, eh… Can we ever get enough of them? I mean, the core of what makes a typical platformer is slightly older than the Speccy platform itself, and there's been loads of them released for our favourite colour computer. Ecclesia is very much in the ZX tradition, and, spoiler alert, I rather like it.

Let's do some back story first. You are Amisko Jones, a mostly fearless and well travelled explorer who has continued his or her adventure to a rather large gothic building complete with foreboding surroundings and roaming spirits and malevolent creatures to avoid.

Amisko is a rather cute and well defined character, who has a look of awe about themself when standing still for long enough. The game starts nice and gently, as it has sign posts to read that explain some of the mechanics, such as the short and long jump (the latter, of course, allowing you to reach further or higher places). Other notices further into the game may or may not aid you, and there are flags that act as restart points once passed, Pitfall II style, as depleting your energy sees you losing one of your five lives, which may be added to by finding red hearts strewn throughout the game.

Within the locale, there are spells to find, energy supplements, and a number of crosses to place the right way up (tracked on the status bar), and of course keys to collect which unlock other dank and eerie places.

The feelings of familiarity here does not dull the experience at all. Graphically, this game is quite stylish and well pixelated, everything moving smoothly. And the accompanying music is subtle and pleasant, changing as you enter or unlock a new area, a very nice touch indeed. This makes it easier to identify which part of the game world you are in.

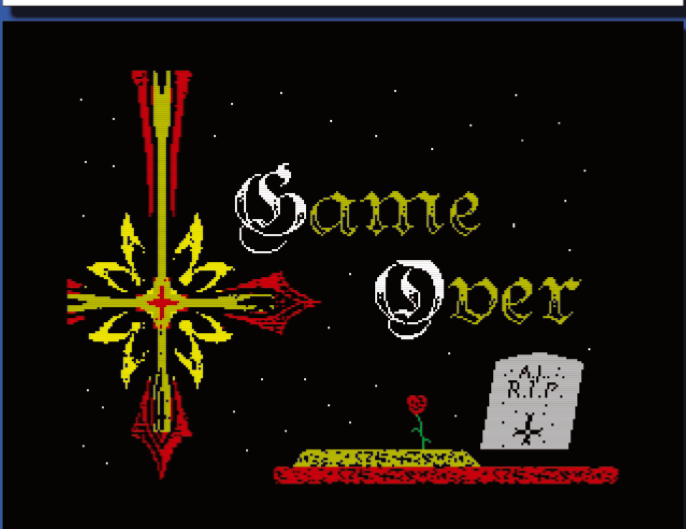
Overall, Ecclesia is a fun, playable and well designed platform game with a subtle learning curve, great graphics and appropriate and pleasing musical scores. Whilst not the biggest game of its type on our big boy 128K Spectrums, there's enough here to keep you both delighted and entertained for more than the odd hour. As already stated, I quite like this.

What more can I say but to request more of the same? As I'm eager to see where our protagonist, Amisko, goes next. Aren't you?

Ecclesia is a game that oozes polish. The graphics, music, and front end place it firmly in the upper echelons of Spectrum platformers for sheer glossiness. Movement is quick and responsive, and there's a neat double jump that adds a layer of skill to judging leaps - which you don't often see in games of this type.

The only thing I didn't really enjoy was the "traps": floors you can suddenly fall through. They are visible if you recognise the flooring pattern, but still feel a little cheap in a game I'd otherwise recommend without hesitation. That said, those purchasing the game from Itch get an "ez" version, which highlights these traps and offers more lives.

Despite that mild criticism, the screens are well designed, and having different music for each area is a lovely touch. Reading the in-game signs is fun and doubles as a tutorial for some of the mechanics. There are also delightful moments - like riding a magic carpet - that elevate this beyond a by-the-numbers platformer. Yes, the familiar tropes are here (avoid/stun the baddies, navigate the rooms, grab pick-ups and hit switches), but the overall impression is one of great care and attention to detail.



Requiescat in Pace in Ecclesia

Bubbleback

Sloanysoft & Lee Bee

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44617

PWYW / $2

From the moment it loaded and the first few notes of ‘The Power of Love’ played, I knew I was going to like this game. And Huey Lewis was right—you don’t need a credit card to ride this train, because it’s free for download. I chose to pay for it though. I don’t want people thinking there’ll be any bias with Sloany being on the Break Space team and all that. Also, I’m feeling flush because my review cassette had a crisp tenner secreted under the inlay.

The backstory follows on from the prequel’s bungled attempt at time travel, causing a temporal rift that allowed an evil Baron to enter our realm, kidnap Dave, and turn Nate into a dragon. You play as dragon-Nate and have to collect 86 bubbles to save Dave. This barmy yarn does a good enough job of crowbarring a Bubble Bobble tribute game into the 'Forward to the Past' franchise.

It's a sizeable flipscreener that has more in common with last year’s *Jet Set Steamboat Willy than Sloanysoft's earlier works. The graphics have come a long way since then—the Bub (or Bob) player sprite is better than the official Speccy port of Bubble Bobble. Actually it might be worth Sloany having another bash with that time machine and taking some graph paper jottings to Firebird HQ, circa 1986. Mind you, the temporal disturbance would probably result in R-Type going to Tynesoft or something.

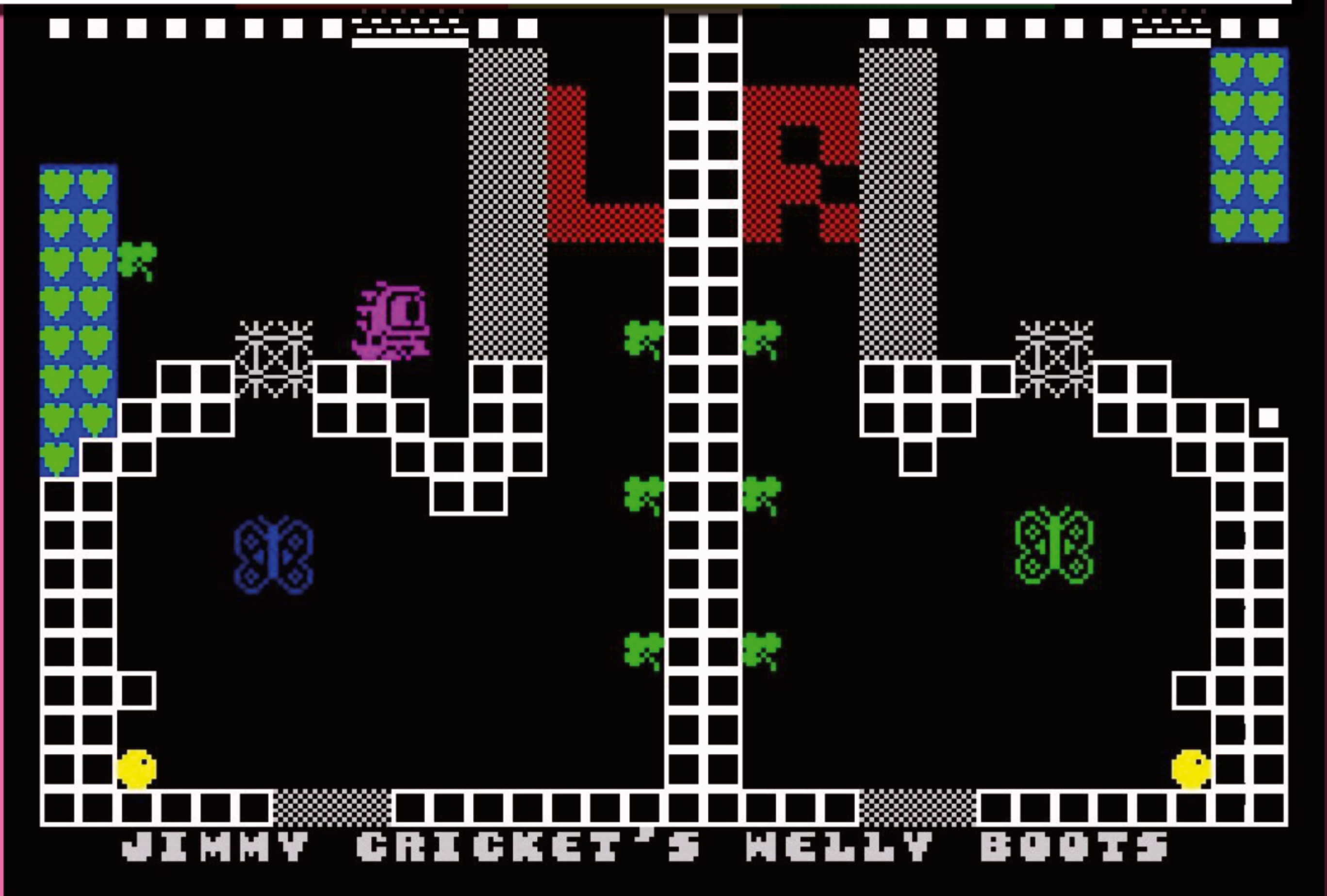
Be sure to use the pause button, because just about every screen has something to savour. It can be a punny title or a whole screen with a separate theme. You’ll see nods to TV, film, games and other 8bit computers. There’s more nods than a nodding dog on a derailed handcart, in fact.

You’ll need the fire button too of course—those cyan baddies appear to be ground based, but the little bounders manage to get *everywhere*. So capturing them and popping the bubble is every bit as gratifying as in the arcade original. The only thing I miss is not being able to cheese points by bursting empty bubbles on walls.

BubbleBack functions on a 48K, but pretend it doesn’t—*Lee Bee’s joyous AY mishmash of tracks from the 'Back to the Future' trilogy are NOT an optional extra. They elevate the game throughout, and some screens even have a bespoke tune. Rest assured—the Bubble Bobble music is there, and it's everything you hoped it would be.

There's a big map to explore, and strategies to learn, so you're unlikely to finish it on your first go. Though with so much to see, you certainly won't begrudge the few more attempts it does take. Sometimes, there’s no such thing as too many sweets.

*Award-winning



There were a surprising number of arguments about these boots in HQ

Oh crikey — I've been tasked not only with reviewing an exclusive, but also a game written by a fellow Breakspace colleague. What a responsibility! Now I know how Woodward and Bernstein must have felt.

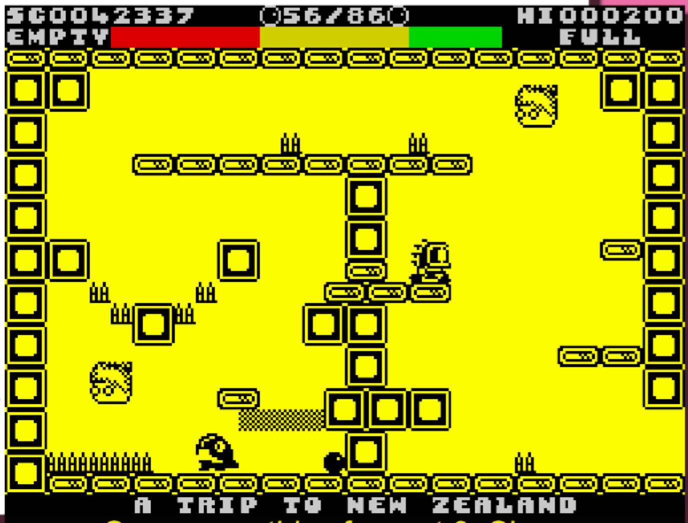
The question is — how do I write this in a way that neither offends my Breakspace brother nor compromises my journalistic integrity? What a conundrum! Oh, sod it — I'll just tell it like it is.

I needn't have worried in the end — this game IS wonderful. As soon as the Back to the Future music kicks in, you know you're in for a treat. Bubbleback takes clear inspiration from Bubble Bobble — the greatest arcade game ever — with a touch of Jet Set Willy (or more accurately, Sloanysoft's previous masterpiece Steamboat Willy!). You travel from room to room collecting little yellow orbs and trapping baddies in bubbles. The flashing monsters can't be killed, though, so careful navigation is essential; let your energy bar drop too low and it's game over. It's easy to get lost in the giant map too — so mapping tools (or a pen and paper) are advised!

The old Bubble Bobble robot nasties return in all their glory — it's like welcoming back old friends. The diverse and well-thought-out rooms are packed with clever references to Speccy gaming and 70s/80s pop culture. It would be spoiling the fun to reveal them all here, so I'll let you discover those bits for yourself.

Bubbleback is clearly a labour of love, and full congratulations must go to Sloany and Nate. Playing it put a big, fat grin on my face — Back to the Future meets Bubble Bobble? How could that be anything but utterly brill?

Okay, enough gushing — I'd better balance things out with some criticism. Here goes: Dave and Nate missed a trick by basing the main sprite on Bub — everybody knows the more interesting (and marketable) character was always Bob. Phew! Journalistic integrity intact!



Save *something* for part 3, Sloany

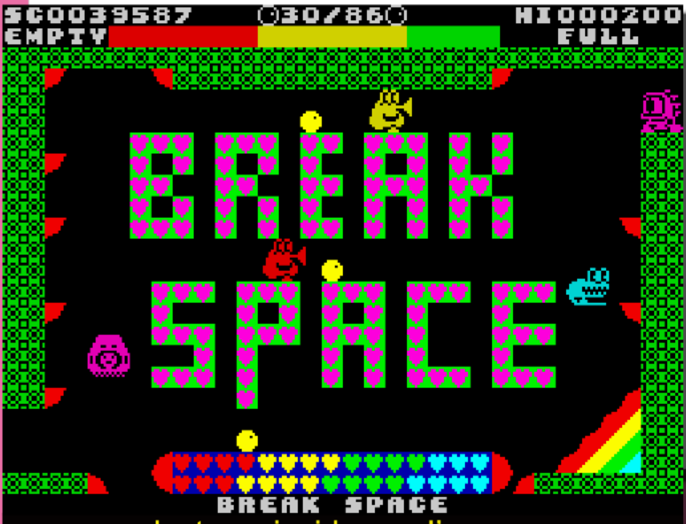
Last but not least, a word of caution.
Here at Break Space Towers, we have been officially warned about using the term "love letter." As previous issues will attest, our stern and uncompromising editor becomes as frightening as Basil Fawlty facing a hapless Manuel who has once again mentioned the war in front of German guests.

So, I choose my words with care as I review a game that, under any other circumstances, I would instantly call a 'love letter to all things retro.' This is a full-throated celebration, paying homage not only to the classic games of the eighties and nineties but also to the pop culture and films of that entire period. It is, on so many levels, a true love letter.

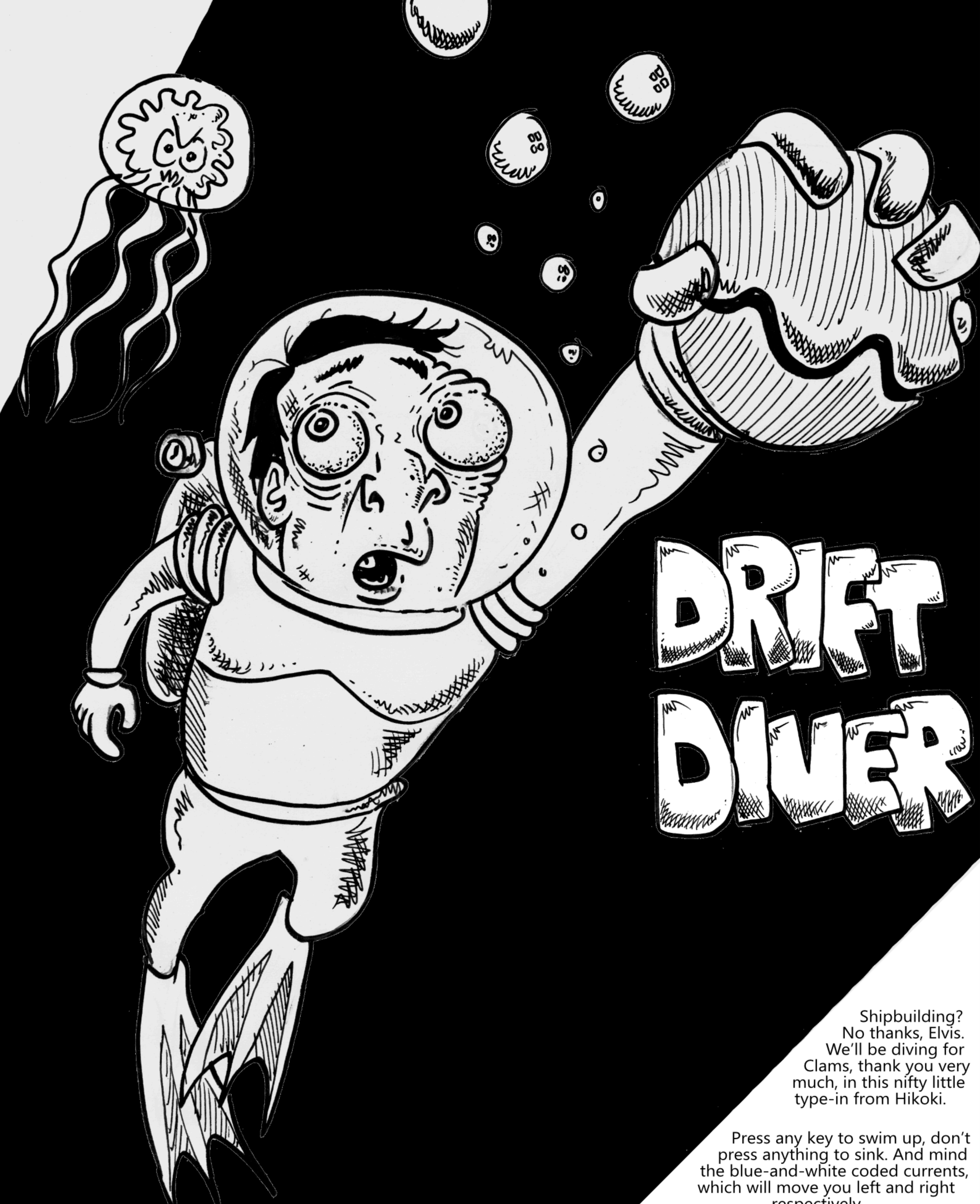
But what can I possibly add? The music is exceptional! It is a genuine treat to listen to these well-crafted tunes, which glisten and shine as only the best 8-bit music can. I am completely here for it.

The game itself has a wonderfully open feel. You can take different paths on each run, making every attempt feel fresh and unique. The difficulty is not too steep, and I get the sense the boys really wanted you to experience everything: the care put into the level design, and all the warm nods to their retro influences. I mean, New Zealand Story, Bubble Bobble, Jet Set Willy, Back to the Future. The Giant's Causeway for crying out loud... it's all in there!

So yes, all right, it's a love letter. I may have mentioned that. But I think I got away with it!



Just a coincidence, I'm sure



DRIFT DIVER

Shipbuilding? No thanks, Elvis. We'll be diving for Clams, thank you very much, in this nifty little type-in from Hikoki.

Press any key to swim up, don't press anything to sink. And mind the blue-and-white coded currents, which will move you left and right respectively.

Collect as many clams as you can before your air, which you can refresh by collecting the red heart, runs out. And, as in real life, don't get eaten by the Kraken.

NOTE - in certain lines, e.g. Line 121, you 'll need to activate the Graphics mode cursor to enter the special characters. Toggle graphics mode ON/Off with CAPS SHIFT+9.
The characters you need to type while in Graphics mode are :
☠ = a 👾 = b ♥ = e
Don't forget to toggle Graphics mode off again with SHIFT+9 and continue typing normally.
The special characters are defined in lines starting at 9662, so you won't see them in the listing until you've run the program one time.

```
10 GO SUB 9650

20 GO SUB 9005

25 LET u=x: LET v=y: LET s=q: LET r=p

30 LET o=o-1: PRINT #0;AT 0,0; INK
9;"O2: ";o;"   ": IF o<=0 THEN PRINT AT
10,10; PAPER 8;"GAME OVER": BEEP 0.02,-40:
FOR h=1 TO 500: NEXT h: GO SUB 9010

32 IF o=INT (m/2) AND n=0 THEN GO SUB 9700

35 IF INKEY$<>"" THEN LET y=y-1

40 IF INKEY$="" THEN LET y=y+1

50 IF y<0 THEN LET y=0

55 IF y>21 THEN LET y=21

65 LET a=ATTR (y,x)

75 IF a=120 THEN LET x=x-1: LET e=146

80 IF a=104 THEN LET x=x+1: LET e=147

90 IF x<0 THEN LET x=31

95 IF x>31 THEN LET x=0

97 LET a=ATTR (Y,X): IF CODE SCREEN$
(y,x)=0 THEN IF a=107 OR a=123 THEN BEEP
.03,45: LET c=c+1: IF c=30 THEN PRINT AT
10,12; PAPER 8;"YOU WIN": PRINT PAPER 8;AT
v,u;" ";AT y,x;CHR$ e: FOR h=1 TO 700: NEXT
h: GO TO 20

98 IF CODE SCREEN$ (y,x)=0 THEN IF a=106 OR
a=122 THEN BEEP .03,45: LET o=o+INT (m/4):
LET n=1

100 LET t=t+1: IF t>1 THEN LET t=0: GO TO
110

105 GO TO 120

110 IF p<x THEN LET p=p+1

112 IF p>x THEN LET p=p-1

114 IF q<y THEN LET q=q+1

116 IF q>y THEN LET q=q-1

118 IF p<0 THEN LET p=0

119 IF p>31 THEN LET p=31: IF q<0 THEN LET
q=0: IF q>21 THEN LET q=21
```

```
120 IF CODE SCREEN$ (q,p)=0 THEN LET q=s:
LET p=r
121 PRINT PAPER 8;AT v,u;" ";AT s,r;" ";AT
y,x;CHR$ e;AT q,p;"🐙"

122 IF x=p AND y=q THEN PRINT AT 10,10;
PAPER 8;"GAME OVER": BEEP 0.02,-40: FOR h=1
TO 500: NEXT h: GO SUB 9010

125 GO TO 25

9005 BORDER 2: PAPER 5: INK 0: BRIGHT 1:
CLS : PRINT INK 1;"DRIFT DIVER"'': PRINT
"Tap to move vertically between  horizontal
streams flowing in   opposite
directions."''"Collect clams and air tanks
while dodging the Kraken.": PAUSE 0:
RANDOMIZE : LET z=1+INT (RND*65000)

9010 RANDOMIZE z: LET x=15: LET y=10: LET
u=x: LET v=y: LET p=0: LET q=0: LET s=q:
LET r=p: LET t=0: LET e=147: LET c=5: LET
o=300: LET m=300: LET n=0: PAPER 7: CLS :
FOR h=0 TO 19 STEP 4: PRINT AT h,0; PAPER
c;,,,,,,,,: LET c=12-c: NEXT h

9600 PRINT PAPER 8;AT y,x;CHR$ e;AT
q,p;"🐙": FOR h=1 TO 30

9610 LET r=INT (RND*32): LET s=INT (RND*22)

9620 IF CODE SCREEN$ (s,r)=0 THEN GO TO
9610

9630 PRINT AT s,r; PAPER 8; INK 3;"🐚": NEXT
h: LET c=0: RETURN

9650 RESTORE 9662: FOR a=USR "🐚" TO USR
"♥"+7: READ b: POKE a,b: NEXT a: RETURN

9662 DATA 60,126,126,255,60,219,102,60

9663 DATA 126,233,253,255,36,74,145,74

9664 DATA 0,4,105,158,158,105,4,0

9665 DATA 0,32,150,121,121,150,32,0

9666 DATA 102,255,255,255,255,126,60,24

9710 LET k=INT (RND*32): LET j=INT (RND*22)

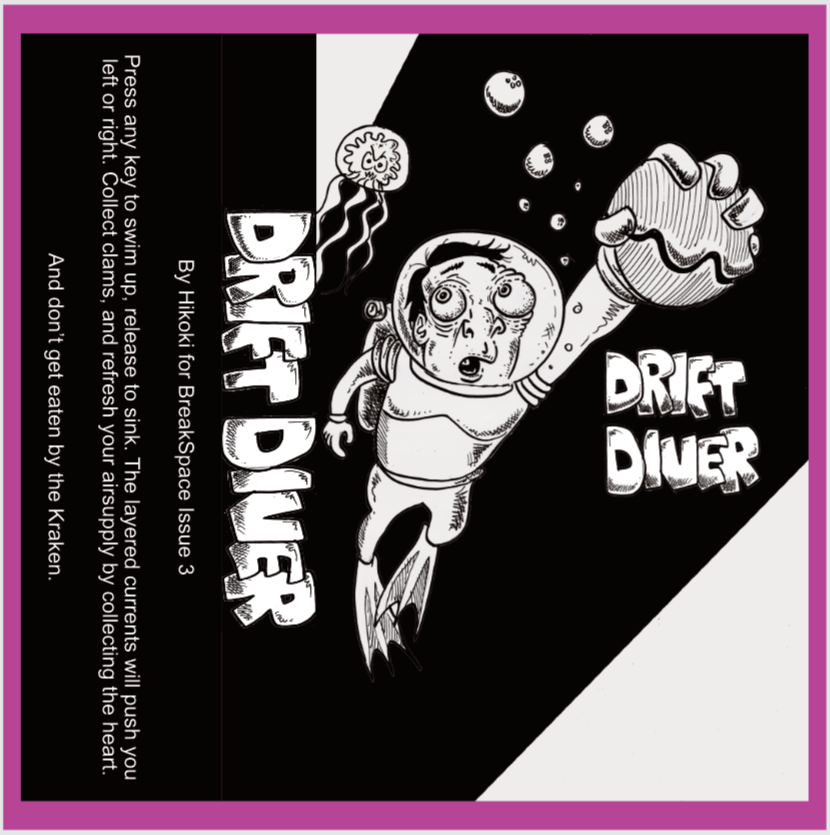
9720 IF CODE SCREEN$ (j,k)<>32 THEN GO TO
9710

9730 PRINT AT j,k; PAPER 8; INK 2;"♥": LET
n=1: RETURN
```

J-Cards!

That's what these things are called.

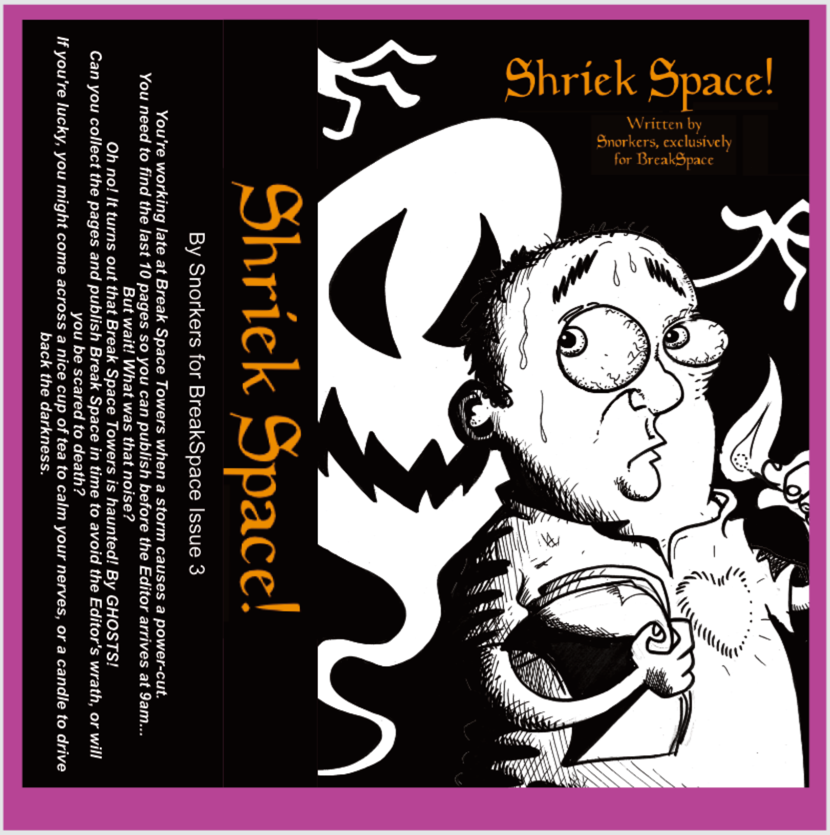
Anyway, if you've saved this issue's type-ins to tape, simply print these fellas out, trim off the magenta borders and stick 'em in a cassette case. Tidy.



By Hikoki for BreakSpace Issue 3

Press any key to swim up, release to sink. The layered currents will push you left or right. Collect clams, and refresh your airsupply by collecting the heart.

And don't get eaten by the Kraken.


Shriek Space!
Written by Snorkers, exclusively for BreakSpace
Shriek Space!

By Snorkers for BreakSpace Issue 3

You're working late at Break Space Towers when a storm causes a power-cut.
You need to find the last 10 pages so you can publish before the Editor arrives at 9am...
But wait! What was that noise?
Oh no! It turns out that Break Space Towers is haunted! By GHOSTS!
Can you collect the pages and publish Break Space in time to avoid the Editor's wrath, or will you be scared to death?
If you're lucky, you might come across a nice cup of tea to calm your nerves, or a candle to drive back the darkness.

La Cripta de Elmion

Mariano E.M. Chiaverano

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44556

Free

Here's a cracking little Spanish BASIC adventure, and one I really enjoyed. In this one, you slip into the muddy boots of intrepid Elmion, a fearless adventurer who's marched off from his hometown of Naustagen in search of glory.

It's always "fearless" adventurers, isn't it? For once, I'd quite like to play an explorer who's terrified of his own shadow. But fearless or not, Our hero Elmion doesn't sound like a popular chap back home. — the villagers of Naustagen insisting he make the "crypt of the forgotten wasteland" his home, with the secret hope that he'll perish. What a bunch of basts!

The crypt itself is a gloomy labyrinth of vermin, traps, and noxious air, untouched by warmth or light from the sun's rays. Sounds a dark, dismal, dangerous sort of place doesn't it?

Therefore it strikes me as somewhat odd that Elmion's first thoughts on arrival are "Here is where I'll see my children grow up someday." I'm not making that up - it's in the manual! I'm not sure what child services would make of Elmion's plans.

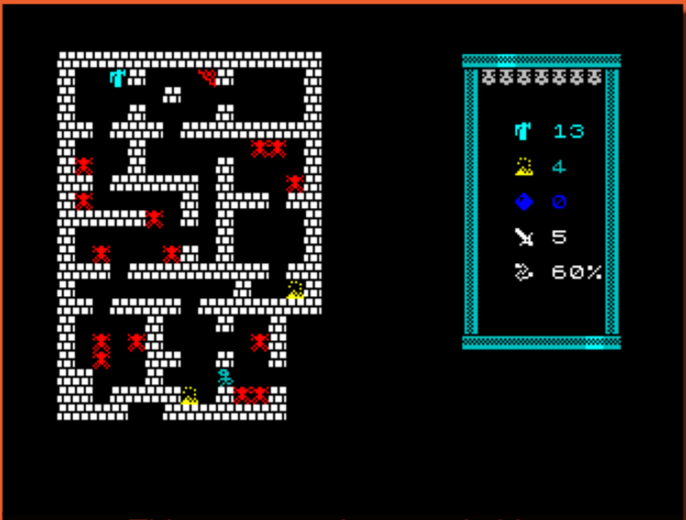
Controls are simple, the classic speccy combo of Q, A, O, P for movement and 1 to dig.

You'll scuttle around caverns mining for gold (that's the yellow stuff), grabbing blue crystals(the blue stuff), and picking up swords (purple). Swords are handy for clearing the passages of "vermin" - but don't get too sword-happy - you'll need those swords towards the end!

To delve deeper into the crypt, you'll need to use your mined gold to unlock yellow doors and crystals at blue ones, all the while keeping an eye on your oxygen levels. Oxygen shortage is your biggest threat. Outside the starting "safe room" it drains rapidly, forcing you into frantic dashes through tunnels, desperately trying to get back to the safe room or a blue oxygen canister which may pop up from time to time. Run out of oxygen and you're dead.

It's a game played at a hectic pace - and I really enjoyed dashing about the place - trying to get back to the "safe room" for a quick breather (pun intended), and a break to collect my thoughts - reminiscent of the safe rooms in Resident Evil.

I actually managed to finish the game - with 177 points, no less! Beat that if you think you're 'ard enough!



This crypt needs a good airing

Once completed you won't have much incentive to play it again - but aside from that, La Cripta de Elmion is compact, well-programmed, fun and has that "just one more go…" quality.

The Crypt of Elmion is an absolute gem. It immediately reminded me of the board game Deep Sea, with its tense focus on managing a dwindling O2 supply while hunting for treasure. The premise here is just as compelling: you must carefully ration your oxygen to explore a crypt, mine gold, battle enemies, and find the exit—a constant, exhilarating risk-reward dilemma.

The entire game unfolds on a single, seamlessly connected screen, with rooms shrouded in darkness until you discover them. While it has the cryptic allure of a rogue-like, the layout is actually fixed, turning each attempt into a puzzle of efficiency rather than chance. The core challenge is pleasingly straightforward: how do you uncover all the secrets before your air runs out?

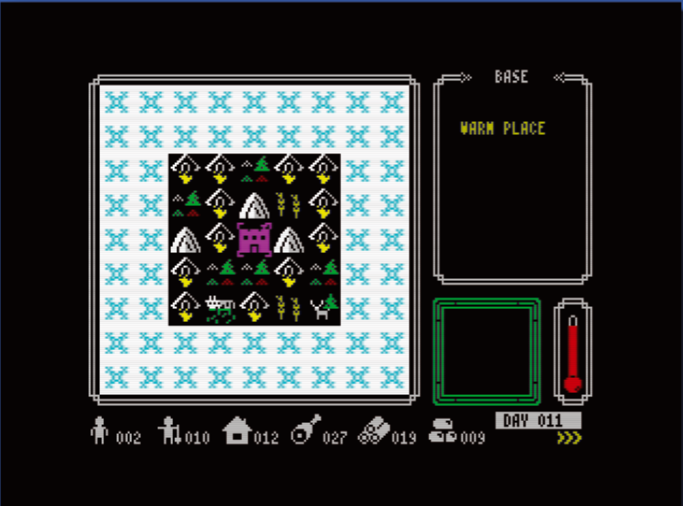
I was thoroughly impressed. It's remarkable that this is written in BASIC, as the gameplay is fast and fluid. A cool design choice allows you to locate the exit early for a quick escape or throw caution to the wind for one last, valuable treasure. This grants the game a layer of replayability, though I agree with the sage advice of Bards: play it once, soak in the perfect, self-contained experience, and then move on. The Crypt of Elmion is a risk worth taking.

Frostland

Roman Skorik

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44483

Free



A Song of Ice and..just Ice, really.

Clear the ice, light the fires, build a little town amidst brutal conditions. Welcome to Frostland, a chilly little strategy game. Does this have the potential to be Speccy's version of The Settlers? Let's find out, shall we?

You start off with your main hub, which is charmingly called your "Warm Place". All around you is nothing but ice, so you'll need to set about building some fires sharpish! The fires melt the ice, and uncover things underneath - stone, dense soil or juicy grass for instance, or you could just be left with a patch of land to build a house on. It's always a gamble what you may or may not find. A couple of times I uncovered something called "A bad place!" - which seems rather Lovecraftian!

After you've built a house or two you can then hire "workers" to live in the houses. These hardy souls can be assigned jobs such as hunting or lumbering. Seeing as wood is so important to get your little village on the up and up - I'd recommend investing in a few of those from the off. Of course, you have to uncover trees under the ice first if you want to give them something to chop!

I felt myself getting into this game quite quickly. I felt a burgeoning sense of solidarity with my little (unseen) settlers! We were in it together, battling the frozen elements around us - and I wanted to do well by them, but all my efforts came to didily-squat when the cyclone hit - smashing me straight in my warm place (oo-er). The instructions say a metrotower will help protect against cyclones - but I tried that and a fat lot of good it did me! The same disastrous end happened to me three times in succession, so I was reluctant to try a fourth time- and this was on the easy setting, too! (I'm not even going to try and attempt the hard setting!)

Also, wood is a constant frustration*. Without it, you can't build fires to clear the ice, so you just have to wait until the days tick by and pray that you have hired enough lumberjacks. But seeing as each house costs 1 wood a day - you quickly find yourself in a situation where you can't advance and your little fellas start dropping dead of extreme cold. Poor little blighters.

This has the potential to be a really good game. With a few quality-of-life tweaks — fewer cyclones, more reliable access to wood — it could easily turn into a highly addictive survival puzzler.

I forget that resource management games are a thing sometimes, probably because when I start them, I become easily hooked. And the more simpler they come, the more I seem to obsess over them. Cronosoft's Fun Park, released in 2004 and developed by Jonathan Cauldwell, is one that I could pour hours into. When this little beauty was assigned to me, I was very happy indeed.

Your task is arduous : clear the icy wastelands to create habitable environments. Once cleared, land needs workers to maintain it, and they in turn need shelter and food. Once segments of land are cleared, you will need to work out which areas are appropriate for housing, fields, fishing, woodland management and stone quarrying, and hire based on your needs. Imbalances, such as a lack of food production, or a supply of wood to heat the houses, will cause population death.

What can be created may also be destroyed; if it's not an imbalance of resources, then it absolutely will be a cyclone or some other devastating weather event which will hit the centre of your city, and once that happens, it's game over. So, you must build quickly to establish a working settlement to protect your initial base in the middle of the gameworld. This is a very important part of the game mechanic, and happens, to my mind, a little too quickly. A few POKEs to delay this would be useful, I think.

This is a pretty neat concept, but I find that I'm not able to spend hours on this as I might with similar games, as, not for the first time this issue, I find this 'ere game that I'm opining about too difficult. Likely, it's something that can be overcome with practise or just blind luck, either work I guess. So, I'm going to have a few more attempts and hope for the blind luck. So, err.. wish me luck, I guess!

Sib City

Andrew771

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44496

Free

You are handed the reins to Tobolsk, the legendary gateway to Siberia, a city of imposing stone walls and vast, river fed frontiers. Your mission is not merely to build, but to restore a legacy, transforming this historic jewel into a powerful modern metropolis. It is a premise as grand and ambitious as the Siberian wilderness itself, offering a depth of theme rarely seen in 8bits.

As a devoted fan of SimCity on the Spectrum, which remains a masterful and fluid port, I approached SibCity with great interest. This is not merely a clone; it is a game with a soul, striving for something more evocative than constructing another generic American city. The ambition to weave real history into the fabric of a city builder is not only noble but utterly compelling. Guiding Tobolsk's expansion, from its iconic Kremlin outward, provides a powerful sense of purpose that pure simulation sometimes lacks.

This grand vision, however, is met with an execution that can feel uneven. The control scheme demands patience, with actions like laying road segments requiring two key commands that interrupt the flow of urban planning. The use of SPACE as a cancel function often feels counter intuitive, especially when compared to the refined interface of its genre counterpart. While the array of hotkeys help streamline gameplay massively, I found the initial lack of clear guidance frustrating and off-putting.

Yet, it is impossible to deny the unique pull of its setting. Where SimCity offers polished, open ended creation, SibCity provides a narrative, a specific, storied canvas waiting for your hand. This thematic richness gives it an identity all its own.

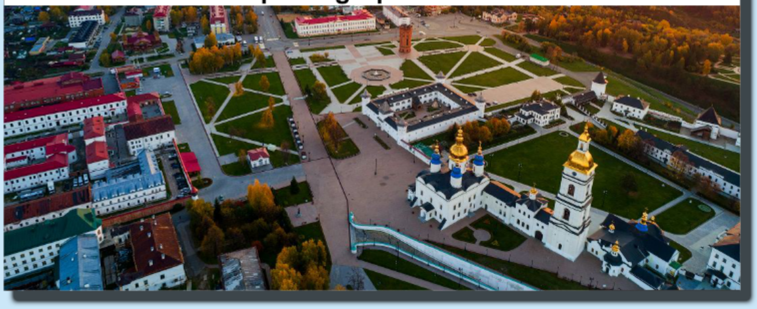
SibCity does not surpass the technical achievement of SimCity on the Spectrum, but it arguably surpasses it in ambition and heart. While its interface can frustrate, the game succeeds magnificently in making you feel the weight of history. Your decisions feel significant because they are applied to a real place, with a real past.

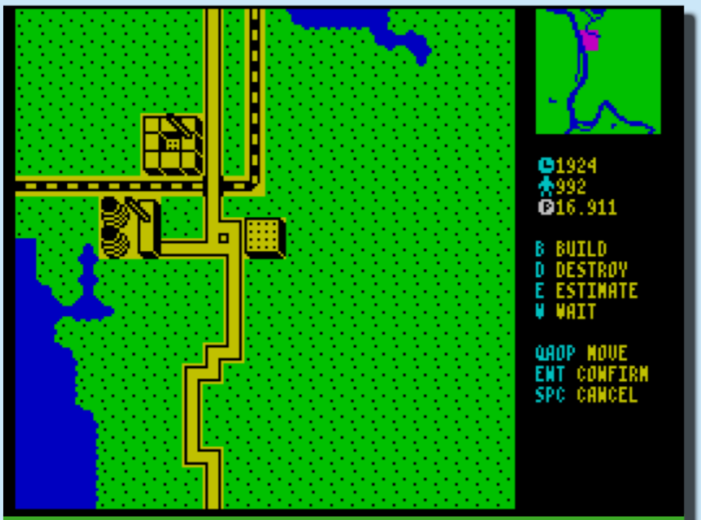
For me, a lover of SimCity, this game offers something profoundly different: not just a city to manage, but a legacy to reclaim. Its grandeur may be slightly dimmed by technical constraints, but its vision, to make you the architect of Siberian history, shines through brilliantly. For any strategy fan seeking a meaningful, and historical challenge, SibCity is a fascinating journey into the heart of mother Russia's rich history. One well worth investing the time needed to fully understand the controls and gameplay mechanics.

In pop culture, 'Siberia' is synonymous with exile, a place where the USSR would send its political dissidents. Tobolsk was a city that received such exiles even before the USSR, starting with a bell. In 1592, the bell in the city of Uglich which rang in announcement of the murder of Ivan the Terrible's last son was punished for its clanging insolence by being sent to Tobolsk. An amusing story, except perhaps for the 60 Uglich families who were also exiled, and had to drag a 300kg bell with them on their 2200km journey.

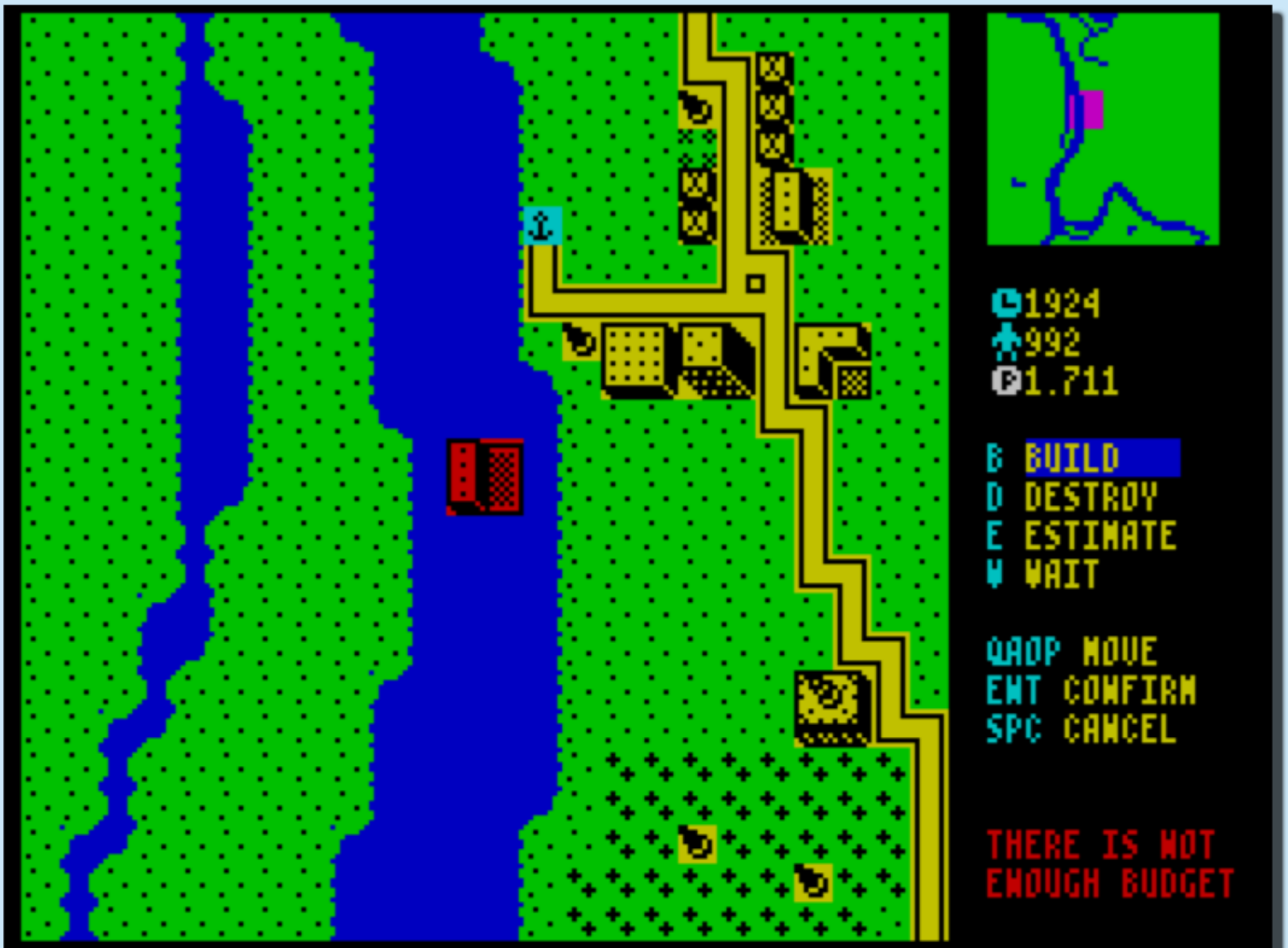
Other notable exiles were Fyodor Dostoevsky and Nicholas II, the last Tzar of Russia.

These days, Tobolsk is an industrial city of 100,000 which looks well in photographs.





Greener than you'd expect of Siberia



THERE IS NOT ENOUGH BUDGET

Not enough money for a floating hospital? What is the world coming to.

Yes, you read that right: Sib City — as in "Siberian" City. You've been drafted in to change the course of history and rebuild Tobolsk, the first city in Siberia (founded by the Russians in 1587)—so you'd better look lively!

If you've played a city-building sim before, you know the drill: put up residential, commercial, and industrial buildings, then hope to turn a profit at the end of the year. Back in the day I piled hours into Sim City, and I was delighted to discover my knack for city building remains the same - I'm complete rubbish. I enjoy the construction side of things, but the economy part always trips me up (and I'm not just talking about gaming - just ask my wife).

I know what you're thinking: "Yes, yes, I know how city-building sims work—but how does it actually play?" Very well, as it happens. Everything runs at a smooth pace—in fact, I booted up the old Spectrum Sim City for comparison, and Sib City runs faster, although obviously very scaled-down. But I agree with JB that the controls aren't as intuitive as they could be. You'll often find yourself hitting the Space when you meant to press Enter, cancelling construction when you don't intend to, and cursing under your breath.

Another thing of note is the complete lack of music or sound effects. I suppose that does lend a certain Siberian-wilderness atmosphere of its own—but still, a beep or two would have been nice! The complete lack of sound comes across as a bit unnerving, and no matter how many parks and schools I built, the city always seemed a little desolate - like it had just been subject to a horrendous nuclear accident.

I couldn't find any instructions online, unfortunately, so my games were mostly trial and error (mostly error). But if you're a fan of city builders, you'll enjoy this. Added to which, the historical angle adds a fascinating extra layer of interest.

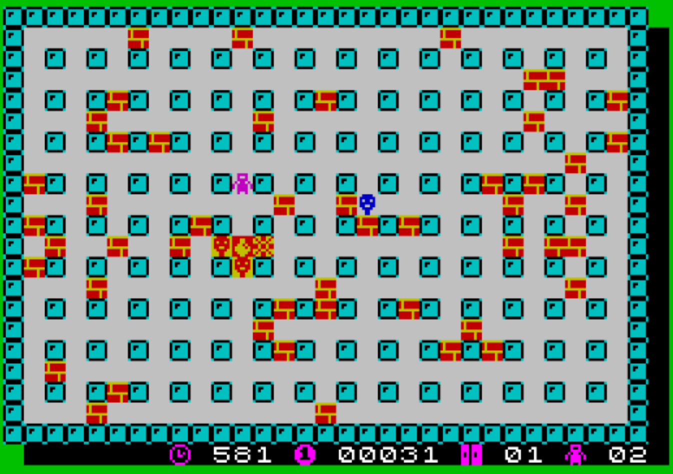
Bombas

Noentiendo

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44605

Free

BomBAS is an ambitious Bomberman clone written in BASIC. Crank the emulator up to 300%, and the game becomes fluid. Sadly, this also means your fuse is too short to escape the blast radius of your own explosives. It's impressive but flawed by very slow gameplay.



Got'em

In fact, the pace is so deliberate it feels less like a video game and more like a live-action version of Bomberman: a team of people running around a maze, placing bombs, lighting them, and scarpering around a corner in the hope of blowing someone to bits. The cutesy graphics do the heavy lifting to mask the game's otherwise psychotic premise. But, obviously, I'm being absurd – maybe I need the fast-paced arcade action to stop my mind from wandering to such dead ends, only to turn around and see a cheekily placed bomb blocking my escape, the glow of its rapidly depleting fuse signalling my imminent demise..

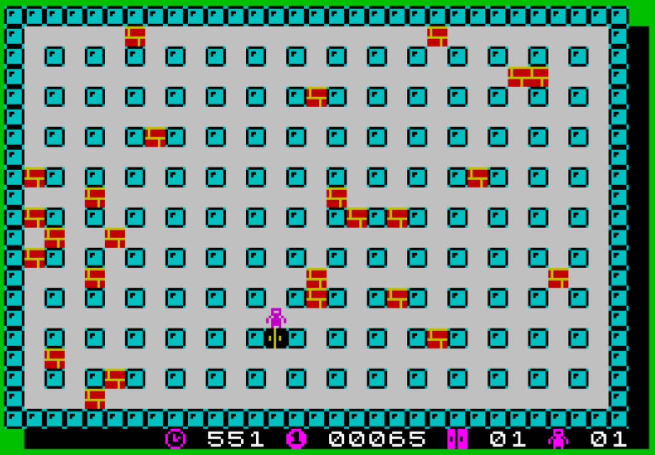
...Back to reality, with a boom: Ultimately, all the logic is here for a full and fun game, replete with patrolling baddies, brick walls to blast through, and power-ups. A compiled version might resolve the performance issues, but without that, BomBAS remains an interesting experiment rather than a serious gaming experience.

The explosive action of the original is far from a damp squib, thanks to BASIC. Rather, its fuse is a slow burn, giving you time to marvel at the technical achievement and curiosity of the author, who finally answered the age-old question: can BASIC produce a playable Bomberman clone?

No. No, it can’t. But I bet he had a blast making it.

Your scientists were so preoccupied with whether or not they could make a Bomberman game in BASIC, they didn't stop to think if they should make a Bomberman game in BASIC.

Come to think of it, what is this “Bomberman” business anyway? This looks more like Eric and the Floaters to me. (I still refer to Opal Fruits, Marathons and Hy-un-dai.)



A-door-able

But I digress, the game itself is not half bad, sure it plods along as games written in BASIC tend to do, but when you work out a strategy of trapping enemies and making a (relatively speaking) swift getaway it is immensely satisfying. Once all the nasties have been dispatched it's a case of blowing up every wall until you find the exit and escape to the next level (don't just wander aimlessly waiting for a congratulations message like I did the first time I played it!)

I found myself enjoying this one way more than I thought I would and I can certainly recommend trying it out, if nothing else to marvel at the ambition. There's fun to be had for sure. After all, life, uh finds a way.

Oh No, More Monkeys!

Softimar

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44543

Free

Monkeys! You gotta love ‘em. Apes, now, that’s a different story. I can’t quite trust an ape. They kid on like they’re Clyde from Every Which Way But Loose, but then : Boom! They’re the chimp from Nope.

Monkeys though, you know where you are. Absolute madmen, every one of ‘em. The main monkey in this little Game and Watch style number is a real piece of work. He’s perched atop a row of 3 trees, all bearing fruit, and he’s not in the mind to share an ounce of it.

Other monkeys, greed in their wild eyes, scramble up the trees, intent on larceny. Your monkey simply has to move left and right, and will bash the skull of any rival in reach. He brings his fist and forearm down like a piston, unanswered and untiring. All burglers are dispatched without compassion. Never mind their motives, their desperation. Their starving children, their grasping, unfeeling landlords, the drought that has killed all fruitful vegetation other than these particular trees. All readily disregarded - the monkey atop the tree owns the fruit, by force of arms. Is this justice?

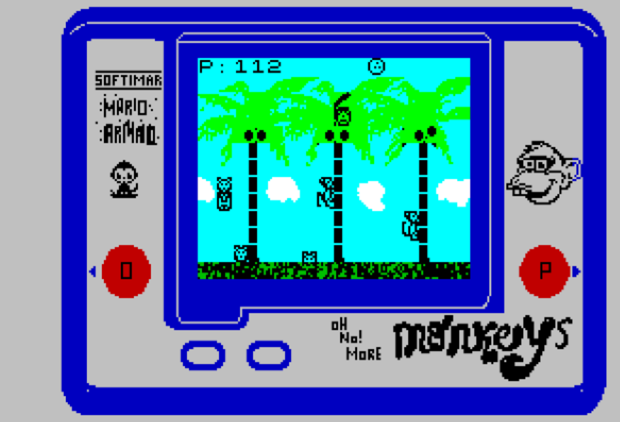
Perhaps, for monkeys, it is.

Even the title highlights the protagonist’s sociopathy. ‘Oh No!’ he thinks, confronted by more of his kind. He does not rejoice that he has a chance at companionship, a chance of community. Maybe they could get a D&D game going. Not for him. All that matters is the wealth to which he has laid claim. Can he even eat all that fruit? Doubtful - He will lay curled up like a simian Smaug atop a nest of golden pineapple chunks while his neighbours starve, or bleed from their shattered temples.

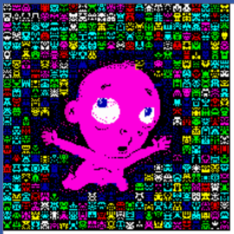
Mechanically, the game works great - you just move left and right, and the other monkeys move up unpredictabley. There are 4 positions on each tree, and sometimes they will turn red and move 2 positions at once. If they get to pause at the top of the tree for a moment, they will leap away triumphantly.

It looks great, with the clean lines of a classic primitive handheld. I suspect Dave will be along in a moment to explain exactly which 80s gadget it’s emulating. He loves that kind of thing. However you look at it, this is another solid, unarguable success from Softimar.

Typically, the next thing I read after penning the above was the obituary of that tramp Jan Goodall. A legendary ape-booster, JG did more for wildlife conservation than almost anyone. We encourage readers to be respectful and kind to their local apes at this difficult time.



Success for one death-defying chap on the left



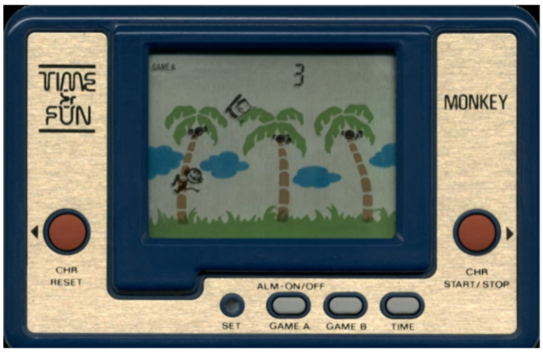
This was indeed a real-world handheld, but not even the author Mario could remember which one. He instead based the game on vivid childhood memories of playing it, which can be summed up as: Monkey, coconut, clubbing (sounds like a great night in and out).

I know that he had a lot of trouble getting the difficulty right. After compiling, early versions ran fast but were too easy. So he added extra features that were not in the original handheld to give it more nourishing gameplay. This involved increasing the monkey onslaught every 50 points, the aforementioned red ‘speed’ monkeys, and at 200 points, eagles fly over to steal your club (and a life along with it).

The initial pace is way too slow for me, but as things rack up, after 100 points or so you feel like you’re playing a game. The eagles in particular are a clever addition, as you can see them approaching, forcing the player to juggle the overhead threat with what’s queuing up below.

If you reach 450 points, the lights go out and it’s night time—and jeez it’s red in tooth and claw. Difficulty rockets up, and before you know it, it’ll be game over for you, and macaroons for the monkeys. Maybe there is justice in the jungle after all.

The original turned out to be ‘Monkey’ from the Vtech Time & Fun range, 1981.
Thanks to LeeP on the SC forum for spotting that.

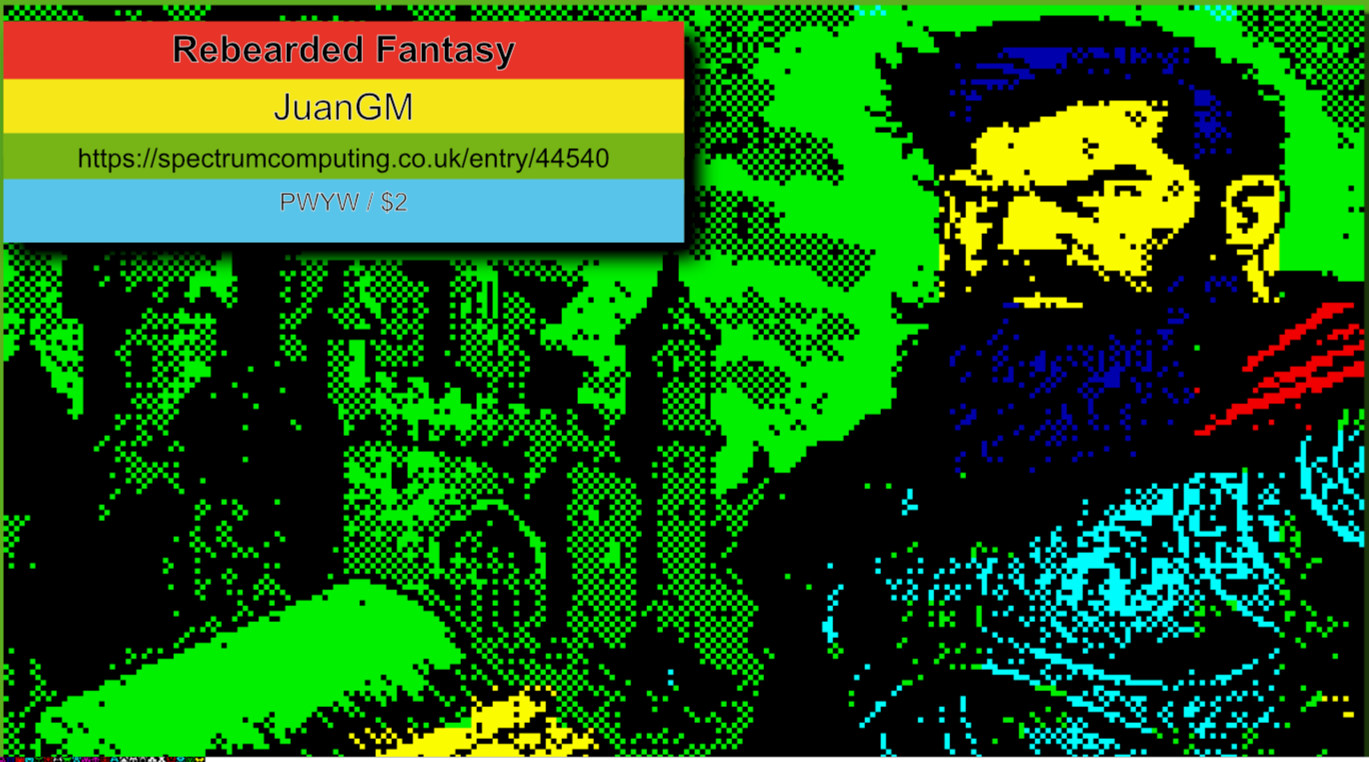


Rebearded Fantasy

JuanGM

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44540

PWYW / $2



Back in January, JuanGM promised a bigger, better sequel to Bearded Fantasy, and nine months later here it is. You seem to have been promoted from your previous incarnation as a hairy handyman, to Sir Paintalot—member of the ancient order of painter-knights, and resident of Beardopolis. Unfortunately, while the fortress was unoccupied, a magical rift opened and now there's a load of monsters squatting in it. It's every landlord's third worst nightmare, behind demonic possession of the bidet, and dry rot.

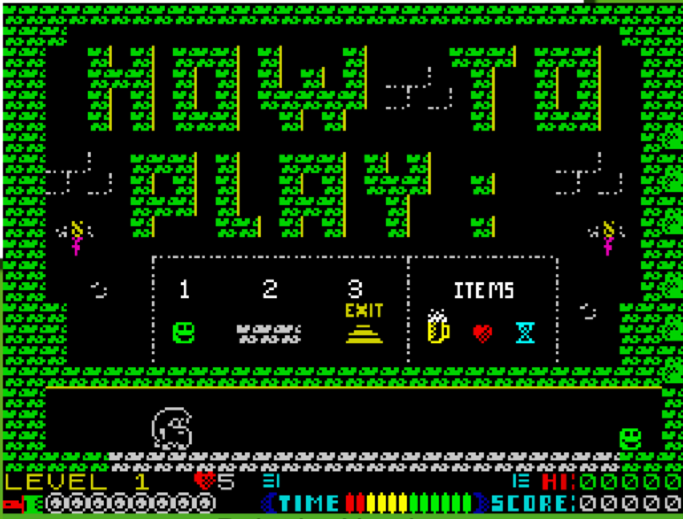
But as we know, green paint represents all that is fresh & good & wholesome, and as such is good Demon Deterrent (coming soon from Farrow & Ball). That's where we pick up from the first game, because this is still a single screen platform painter game, only this time made with ZXGM and not pure Boriel BASIC. For this reason the physics are familiar, with fairer collisions and more reliable jumps, so if you stand in the lava, it probably is your fault.

Our hirsute hero looks slightly more refined, and when you stand still for too long there's a great 'huh' animation worthy of Robert Crumb himself. The patrolling nasties are better looking and more varied, as well as having stationery hazards like moving spikes and yawning spiders. In fact generally everything's been given a polish, resulting in busier screens that look more like a regular action game.

And that fits, because the gameplay is not particularly puzzle orientated. There are teleports, but they aren't used very much, and they only screenwrap rather than act as the unpredictable portals that formed much of the gameplay in the first game. Also you cannot jump through unpainted blocks as before, resulting in a more straightforward gameplan. That's fine though, because there are 40 levels to enjoy, and trust me—they are far from easy. You will hear the 'Argh!' sound effect a lot more often than the 'Yeah!'.

In addition to beeper speech, AY is used quite inventively. You get a snare drum beat until you collect the paint, then the music kicks in proper. I have to say though, it's really not for me and doesn't fit the game at all*. But it got some favourable comments on the itch page so it's a matter of taste I suppose.

Rebearded Fantasy feels like going to your favourite pub to discover it under new management. It hasn't retained all the character, but there's a lot of welcome changes. The décor is nicer, they've built an extension, and got rid of the ammonia smell in the toilets. If only you weren't deafened by HeartFM every time you sipped a pint.



Paint by Numbers

Wait. Painting the floor? Who paints their floor?

Not just for concrete basements and warehouses anymore, it seems like new-fangled epoxy paints have made it more of an option for the interior decorator on a budget.

Consensus seems to be that you'll still get some chipping and wear in high-traffic areas, but it can give a nice gloss effect on polished concrete or other suitable surfaces.

Don't paint your old carpet though.

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*You can turn the music off by pressing 'M', but you have to do it anew every level.
POKE 36924,8; 36963,8 disables the AY entirely

Whatever happened to Hipsters? Are they still a thing? Or are they now some minor, largely unseen cult of beard enthusiasts who hide away in sacred places? Well, what can be more Hipster than being not just bearded, but rebearded, eh? And our hero in this considerable production, Rebearded Fantasy, is one who likes painting, specifically floors.. What can be more Hipster than that, one has to wonder?

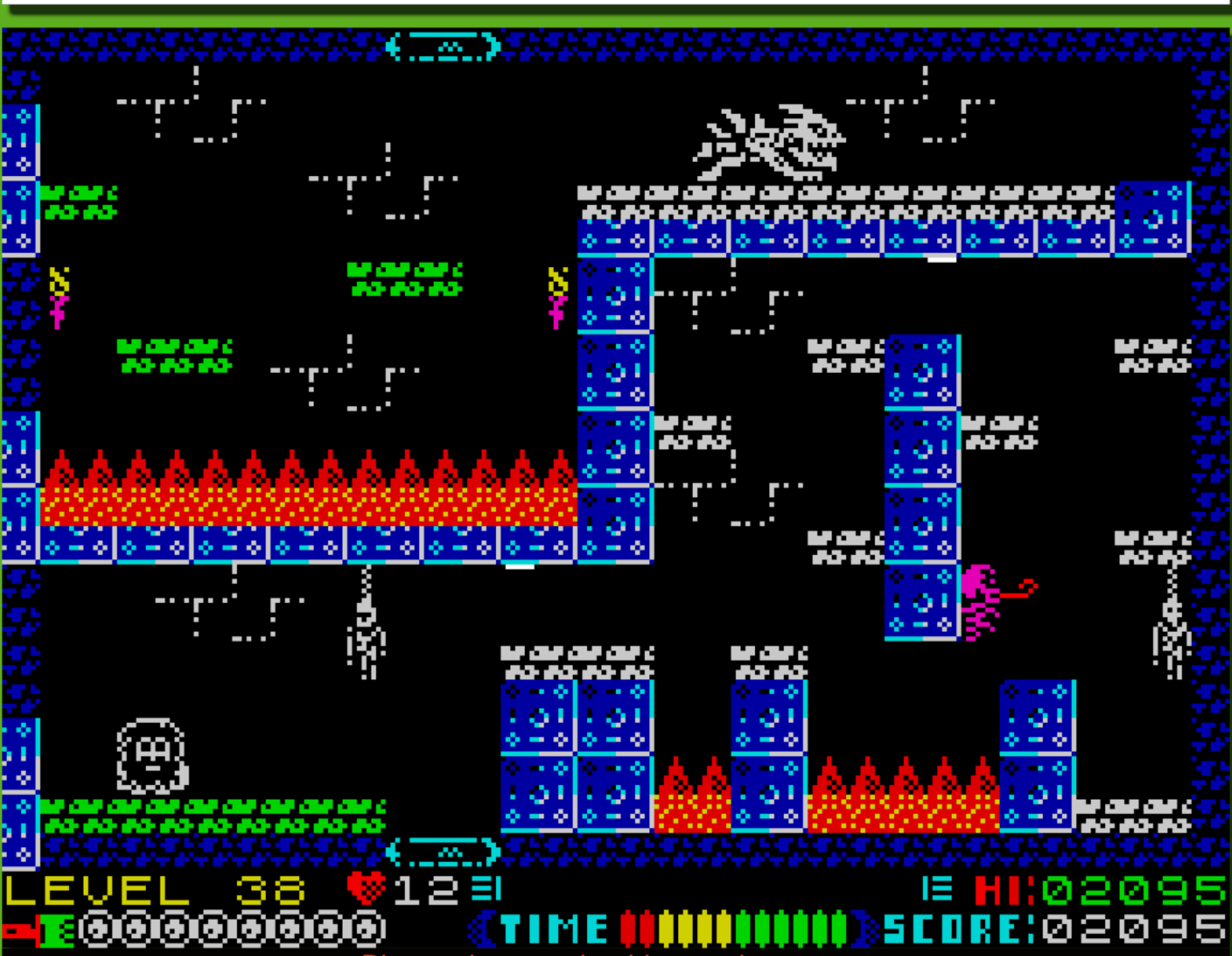
I quite like games with simple controls, and here, you must only worry about left, right, and jump, like Boni in Bat Hell! Though, let me promise you here, it's a much much much more easier experience. I certainly used fewer expletives whilst jollying myself through each single screen level for sure. And that's a good sign as my neighbour at one point thought I'd developed spontaneous tourettes the other week. Aside from the simplified controls, here endeth the similarities to the hard as nails Boni game.

As already mentioned, each level is a single screen. Your task: collect the paint, paint the floors, collect any power ups (including, I see, a Hipster Fine Ale brewed from Avocado and Quinoa or something), and once each platform is turned green, an exit appears and you are rewarded by doing it all again on a progressively more difficult level. Great.

This game has some really nice pixels, and everything moves with fluidity and mostly with ease. I do find, however, that the time pressure on some levels forces my fingers to mangle as I try to move to get the last few platforms to paint, and I'm putting this down to my skill levels rather than any major issue with the game mechanics. And, I am saying this not to cause controversy or division here: I do like the way that the music brashly announces itself once you collect the power up to enable you to paint (though restarting it when collecting other power ups seems like a bug more than a feature).

What can I say, it's easy to get into, level one being the most gentle it can be without the game doing it for you, and the levels are nicely designed, bright screens with some lovely pixels moving about. Go relive your own Hipster years by joining the rebearded revolution.

Download this fast, fun and simple 2D platform game and enjoy. An excellent game after you finish your cold brew coffee or something, in this good, old-fashioned platforming romp.



Blue and green should never be seen…

Fate of the Pirate

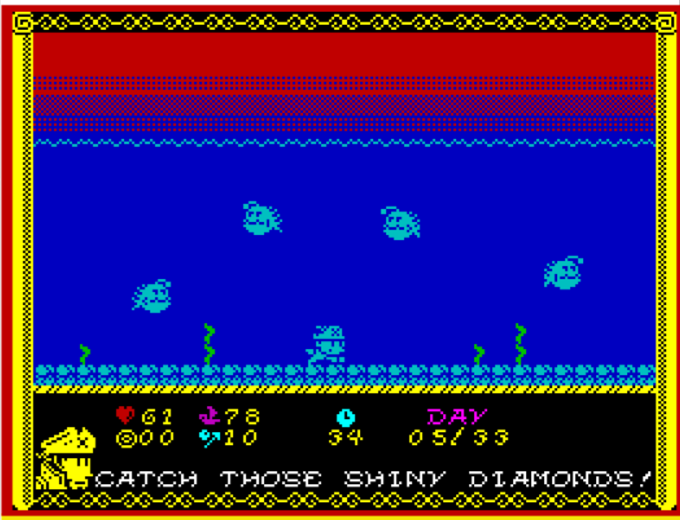
Ariel Endaraues

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44598

Free

In Fate of the Pirate, a captain's world is shattered by a storm that claims his family. Driven by grief, he embarks on a desperate quest to the Eternal Lighthouse, a mythical beacon said to summon the ghost galleon and return lost souls to the living. This sets the stage for a harrowing voyage of redemption and damnation. Will you be walking the plank or counting your pieces of eight by the end of your journey?

The core premise is a master-stroke: a pirate-themed Oregon Trail where your fate isn't left to random chance but is decided by your performance in action-packed mini-games. Over 33 days, you'll navigate text-based events testing your captain's wit and engage in arcade-style battles against storms, sea monsters, and rival duellists.

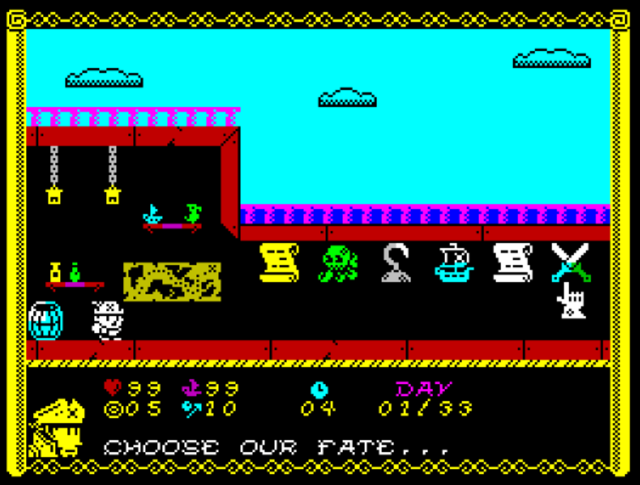


CATCH THOSE SHINY DIAMONDS!

Arr, keelhauled for poor performance!

This ambitious fusion of genres is both the game's greatest strength and its primary weakness. The potential for player agency is most welcome. Unlike the passive randomness of Oregon Trail, here you feel directly responsible for your crew's survival, in theory. In practice, the experience is sometimes undermined by a lack of any sense of actual progression. The journey feels less like an escalating adventure and more like a disjointed series of events, leaving the captain's poignant motivation to fade into the background.

Furthermore, the mini-games, while varied, suffer from jarringly inconsistent design. Some can be trivialised by exploiting a safe spot on the screen, breaking any tension. Others feel unfairly difficult, swapping strategic challenge for frustrating random chance and sheer blind luck. This imbalance prevents the gameplay from ever finding a satisfying rhythm, making success feel more arbitrary than earned.

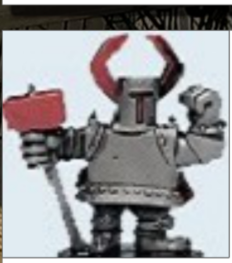


CHOOSE OUR FATE...

Choose your fate!

Yet, through these frustrations, the game's more compelling aspects begin to shine through. The pixel-art presentation is charming, and the foundational idea remains powerful. It calls to mind classic genre-blenders like Hostages and North & South, proving the developer has a keen eye for inventive gameplay.

Fate of the Pirate is a compelling, flawed experiment. It possesses the raw materials for a truly great game: a brilliant premise, charming style, and a genuinely innovative concept. However, without a clearer sense of progression and significantly more polished mini-games, it remains a voyage worth recommending for its potential, rather than a fully realised adventure. It's not quite "pieces of gr-eight" yet, but the treasure map is undoubtedly in its hands.



Minigames! Hurrah! It’s always nice to have a passle of minigames. And pirates are cool, too.

Surely a winning combo then. But the issue with mini games is always consistency. There’s a few here that don’t quite work for me, and there are also a few non-game text options that resolve randomly and feel like you’re playing a kid’s boardgame.

If I’m focusing on the negatives here, it’s because most of the mini games do work, are great fun and, at like 30 seconds, stay fresh.

The full 33 day trip is pretty tough to get through, but it may be worth the journey. It rather depends on whether you feel the the few bad apples in the barrel spoil the lot.

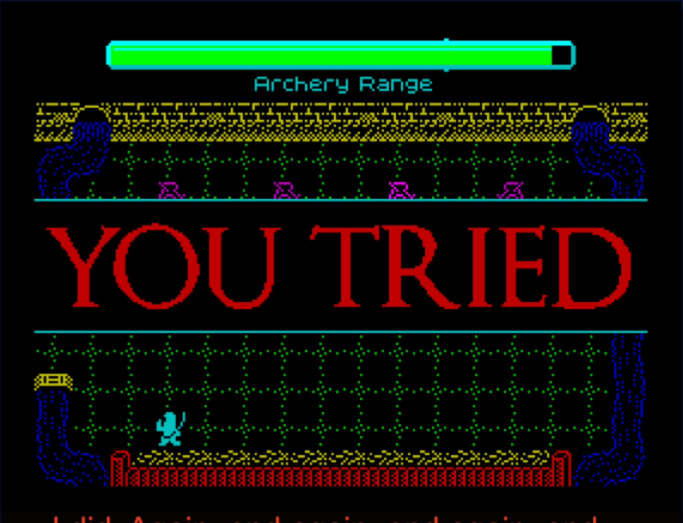
At the absolute least, it’s worth your time playing through each of the games once to take in the varied sights and sounds on display.

Stamina

Snauts

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44591

Free



I did. Again, and again, and again, and…

We like dungeon crawling here at BreakSpace. We also like Ace-winner Snauts, for his always varied titles. And we like Chess to a point as well, with MasterPiece captuing itself an Ace in issue 2. And do we like Dark Souls?

No we bloody don't. Well, I don't anyway. Unfairly, of course, because I've never played it. I don't like how it looks. I don't like how it's sold as an extremely difficult experience. I quite enjoy some of the Souls-like memes though, and in 2025 maybe that's enough.

This is all relevant because Stamina is a Chess-ish dungeon-crawling puzzle game from Snauts with Dark Souls atmosphere and trappings. It's turn based - on each screen there's an adversary, who moves like a chess piece. Your adventurer moves one square in a cardinal direction. You take turns. If you are next to them, and have enough energy, you can slash them to death. But if you're in a place where they can move into you, then you're dead.

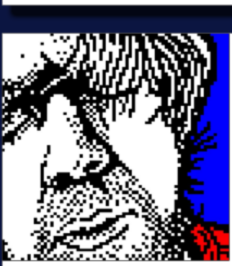
Which sounds reasonable. But sometimes there're 2 or more of the baddies, which is fine if they're moving like pawns, less so if they're bishops or knights. The less said about the Queen the better. In some cases you just want to get past the screen, which is tricky enough, but you need to defeat the major pieces, which feels all but impossible. Fail, and you're set back to the start or, if you've found it, a campfire. This will happen a lot.

Occasional cryptic clues can be found on the walls, and there's a welcome slice of cheese that you can literally stumble across that makes the penalty for death less harrowing.

The disadvantages you face seem major - you don't move as flexibly as your foes, and your energy drains very rapidly. Several times I've finally maneuvered an enemy into striking range, only to discover that I didn't have enough energy left to finish them.

But I guess that's the point.

This is every bit as difficult as its inspiration's reputation, and does a great job of summoning up a dreary atmosphere with simple cues. Another success for Snauts, especially if his goal was to make me feel like an absolute moron. Bravo.

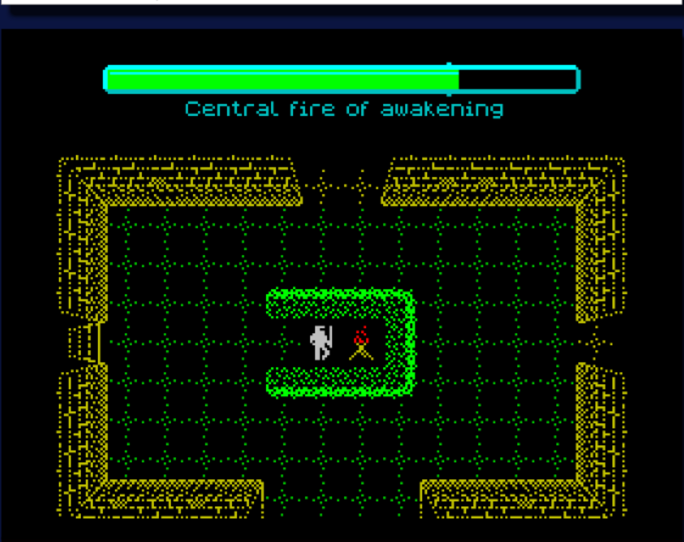


It's not the winning, it's the taking part that matters." I keep telling myself this, because "Aww, as long as you tried your hardest" rings in my ears every time I'm bested by this game.

At heart, it's a turn-based puzzler that harks back to Chase in the early '70s (or Daleks, Robots, etc., depending on which system you first encountered it on). The twist here is that different baddies move in different ways, requiring unique approaches. Whilst there are some foes I simply can't beat (I'm waiting for someone to upload a longplay on YouTube so I can kick myself), it often seems that pushing the scenery around to restrict enemy movement is the key to success. I'm not sure that counts as a "tip," given my limited expertise.

The music is unusual for an AY composition, with a nicely eerie atmosphere and swelling notes and noise that had me looking up the composer's other work. Presentation is strong, and the stickman-like hero reminds me of Hall of the Things (another punishing game) and Maziacs; both comparisons I wholeheartedly approve of.

I've spent more hours on this game - albeit unsuccessfully - than I'd care to admit. Possibly it's only for a certain kind of masochist, but it's excellent nonetheless.



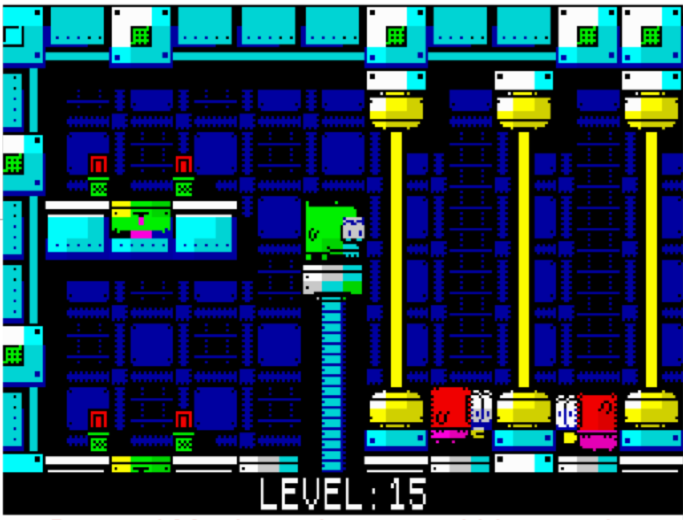
Expect to see a lot of this respawn room.

Zak McDrucken Saves the Chickens

Retrosouls

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44562

PWYW / $2



Bernard Matthews has upped his security

You know that feeling you have when you KNOW you're going to love a game before you've even played it? Well I get that every time I see the name RetroSouls. The creators of the likes of Gluf, Ringo and Old Tower seem to enjoy cocking a snook at the so-called limitations of the Speccy's colour palette and chortling in the face of attribute clash. Yet somehow in the midst of all this technical wizardry, they never forget the key component of a great game is its playability.

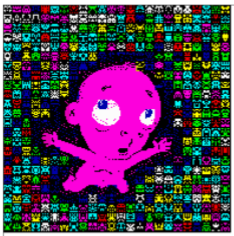
But just who is Zak McDrucken? How have the chickens wound up in this predicament? Why is it Zak's job to save them? The answers to none of these questions are found in the game's 15 word synopsis.
All we can glean there is that the chickens need teleporting, Zak isn't very happy about it, and he has a penchant for inzerting the letter z into wordz.

Choosing to let the game speak for itself then, what we have here is a platform puzzler where our hero must manoeuvre some weird cube-like chickens to safety via some handy teleporters. Where they're teleporting to is anybody’s guess, but teleport them you must - then it's on to the next level.

There are no lives or timers to contend with, just pure platform puzzling. The puzzles themselves are not the most taxing you'll ever find on a ZX Spectrum but I found them to be just devious enough to have to take a few restarts on most levels and towards the end they do prove to be quite head-scratchy indeed.

My only criticism (aside from wanting more) is that it could do with a bouncy tune a la Gluf, to go along with your bouncy protagonist, however it needs to be pointed out that this game can be played on a stock 48k Spectrum. That's right, the actual budget computer from 1982 that was bought to help with your homework, with zero enhancements.

I completely and utterly devoured this game in a single sitting. It's the perfect way to spend a couple of hours of your precious Speccy time. Zak McDrucken Saves The Chickens is 20 levels of pure joy that although thoroughly satisfying, could leave you begging for more.

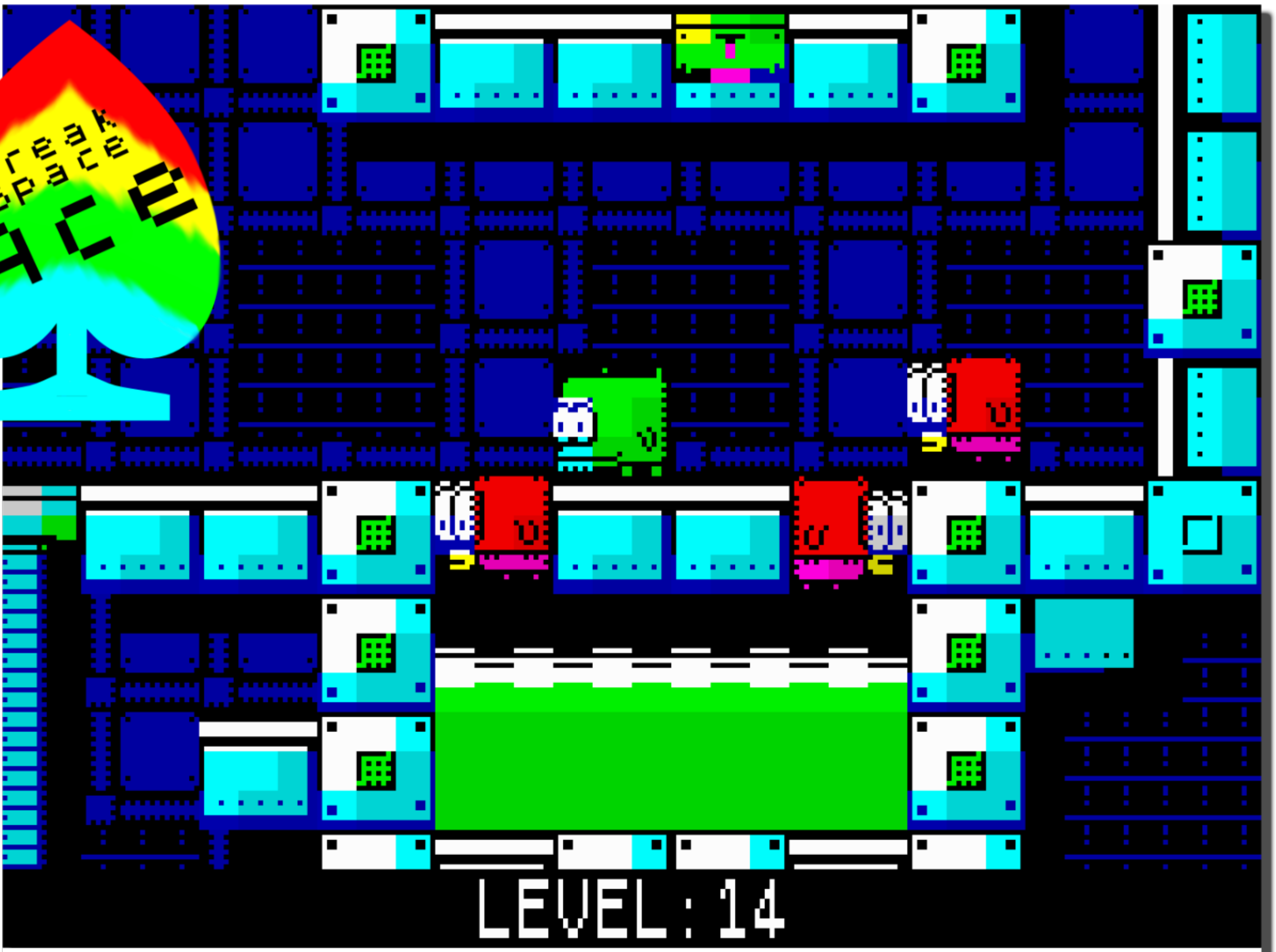


‘Zak’ is another example of Denis Grachev’s increasingly zany style, somehow mangled together with level design nous, coding brilliance, and a comprehensive understanding of the ZX-Spectrum’s intimate parts.

The screen is a riot: scrolling grills in the background, giant lasers pulsating, and let’s not forget you and the chickens gyrating like tots on tartrazine. There’s a lot of pixels being pushed here, and fast. With all that going on, I quite like that it’s a 48K game—it even utilises the Sinclair font! This is a reminder that generally, most of the magic in technically impressive games takes place in main RAM, with the 128K extras being window dressing (citation needed). Playing it on dead-flesh gives you even more of an ‘imagine if we had this in 1982’ moment. Hell – imagine if we had it in 1992.

I needed the tutorial levels, and fell into most of the traps the author set. About halfway through I started to flounder, as levels got bigger and I struggled to visualise the whole level. That’s the challenge though—if everything fit on one screen it would be a different game.

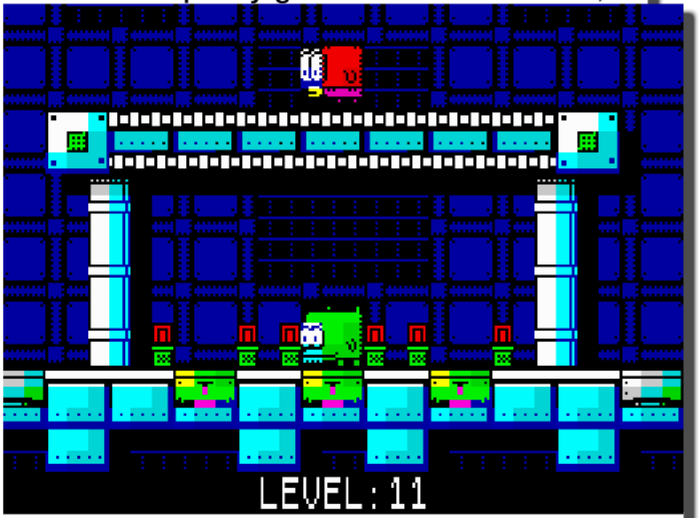
Retrosouls have done it again with this Ace game. Not only does the Speccy have the best software in the galaxy, it has the best nutterz too. SQUAWK!



Clucking weird soup…

Retro Souls have something of a reputation of greatness that resembles that which the late, great Don Priestley had for his Speccy games in the 1980s. So, will Zak McDrucken Saves The Chickens live up to this high standing? The answer is yes. Go play it now. The short-hand review is over, and the lazier amongst us need read no further.

Starting with some really snazzy 1-bit music followed by a short introduction to the basic premise of the game, you must guide Zak around some beautifully designed levels, the sort of level designs where you wonder if you're playing a Speccy game at all, which reminds me of when I first saw Trap Door and imagined how such a humble 8-bit computer could do graphics like off the television programme; that sense of child enchantment was a sound gush of nostalgia for me.



Woah-oh, halfway there. Woah-oh, wings and some hardware

The game plays smoothly: pick up each of the chickenz to one of the teleport points and throw them there and they magically vanish. Once all the chickenz are safely teleported, it's onto the next level. But there are some caveats; the lifts move quickly, and the safest way to do anything is to align the lift floor exactly with the platform in which the hapless chickenz are stuck. Otherwise, some levels are uncompletable. However, a quick hit of the R key resets your level. (Note: I had to do this from level two, such are my simpleton gaming skills).

Zak McDrucken Saves The Chickens is a feather-light triumph that clucks with joy, proving Retro Souls can still ruffle the ZX Spectrum's feathers like the golden age never ended. Well, I'd say that we're in a new, better golden age actually, with only the mid 1990s through to around 2004 being something of a dim age. Consider this your wake-up call from the coop.

Boni 2 - Return to Bat Hell

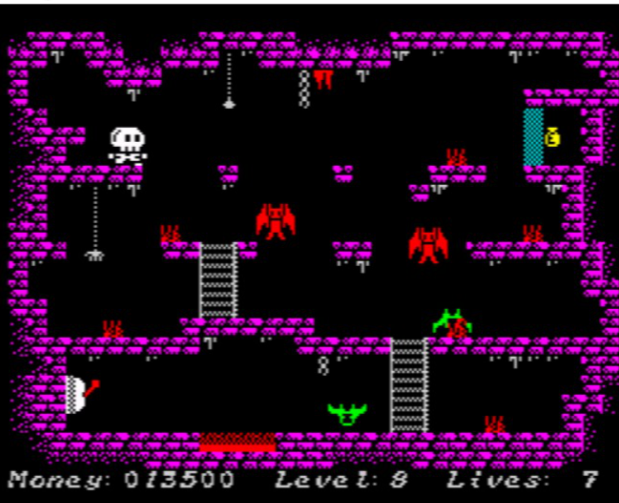
Steve Tyson

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44538

Free

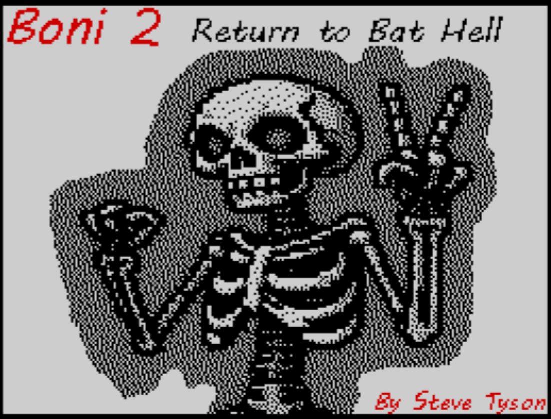
Clearly Steve Tyson hates me/ you/everyone
In the rapidly released sequel to Boni), Boni 2: Return To Bat Hell very much takes the approach "if it ain't broke…", by providing 20 more levels of very unforgiving platforming for Boni to navigate. The jump-then-move technique rather than jumping whilst moving is highlighted in the instructions and is – if anything – even more necessary than in the first instalment. Apparently created in response to an über-gamer twitch streamer (or masochist) who declared the first game was 'too easy' the sequel reduces the number of lives and only provides a limited time option for an extra life on every other level.

The game lists the DanTerrifik games (TokuSoft 2020-2023) as its inspiration, and – generally – these are excellent games, but unlike Boni's outings those games give you loads of lives to play with. The punishing difficulty is offset by a generous life count, so a player who isn't spamming the savestate key in their emulator might actually see a few levels with practice. Realistically most players of Boni (1 or 2) will see a lot of the menu screen as they restart the game from level 1. It's not often I think an infinite lives poke would drastically improve a game, but I think my enjoyment would have been heightened with an option for lots of lives, infinite lives, or even those extra lives orbs giving me another dozen lives or so.



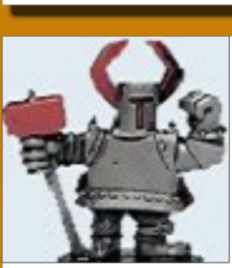
Andy showing off here, with a Level 9 screen

Whilst I generally found it far too hard, the game is also strangely compelling, and I really did want to navigate my way through the screens (albeit using savestates, like the rotten cheater I am). It might have been luck or my skills improving but I did find some of the levels of hell slightly less hellish than others.



I'm no zoologist, but that's not a bat skeleton.

The magenta colour scheme and chirpy AY music (including Yakety Sax of all things) make the nightmarish journey even more absurd. The instructions on Itch make it clear that the protagonist skeleton is male (it's left ambiguous with the first game) and I've realised that the titular Boni is probably pronounced "bone-e", rather than the Bonnie (Langford) I was imagining. This is a me-problem rather than a criticism of the game.



Okay. So the gang complained about Travel Unlimited being hard. So I had to step in and beat it. Then it was La Piramide de Xaltocan. So I had to confirm - It ain't so tough. And now there's 2 Boni games and there's mewling from the pen. Let's see. I've never been good at games, so I'm worried that I've got a bunch of Duds here. At least Shaun finished Frostland, I guess.

Level 1. Doesn't look hard, honestly. 6 restarts later, and I'm on level 2. Which is harder. Maybe 10 restarts. Level 3, I beat in one go, but level 4 wipes me out. Then I can't get past level 2 again for ages. I phase out for a while, thinking about the Benny Hill bit where he slaps the little bald guy on the head. The music seems to salve the frustration.

And anyway, Boni deserves everything he gets. He's gone back into hell to get gold? What's a skellington going to spend gold on? Idiot.

Back to it. Level 4 is where I start using save states, when I finally do make it there again. And I agree with Andy, and the others. This is very hard. But if that's what you like, you'll be impressed with this. It handles well. Sharp. Responsive. The levels are well thought through and devious. I also agree that it might do better with an infinite lives option - call it a training mode if you like. ANDREW RYALS is just going to do one anyway, and it'd be nice to play without the chore of that or save states.

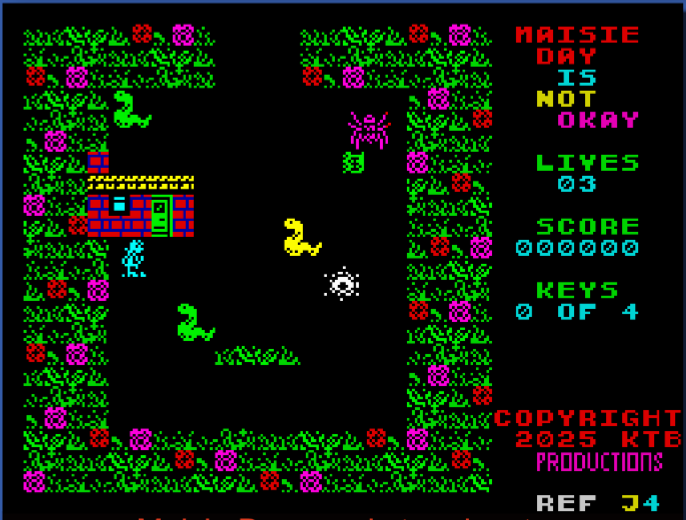
But anyway : This is hard, but good, and the Review Crew's reputation is safe.

Maisie Day is Not Okay

KTB Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44568

PWYW / $2



Maisie Day needs to relocate

Maisie Day is not okay… hmm, I'm not sure I'd be okay if I lived in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by a massive intricate maze that's full of creatures that are out to kill me, so our protagonist has my sympathy here. Hold up, Maisie, I'll help you find your keys. Though why she has to find four is a mystery. Talk about being overly security-minded.

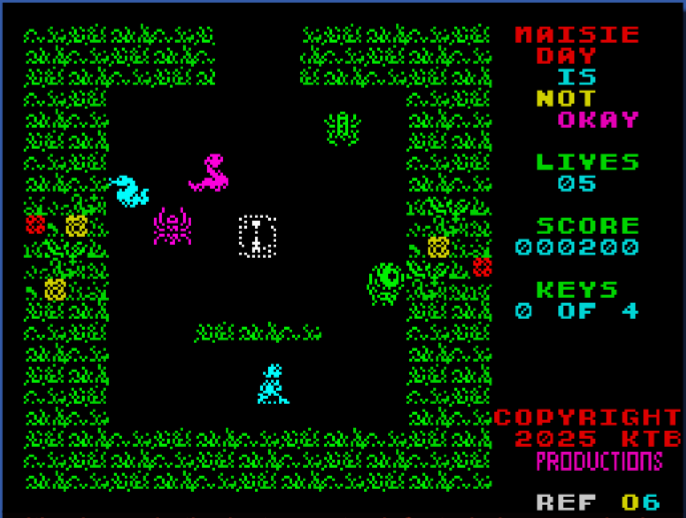
This production is an obvious nod to Ultimate Play the Game's rather well loved Sabre Wulf, which earned itself a plethora of awards back in 1984. I always found it to be a little on the difficult side and, not for the first time this issue, I'm struggling through this game too. What helps is that there is a clear mapping system visible in the bottom right hand corner of the screen, with the "J4" reference being your home.

In my view, the game difficulty could be tempered by not having nasty spiders and such spawn right next to the player, or at least have a slower spawning process to give the player more time to react.

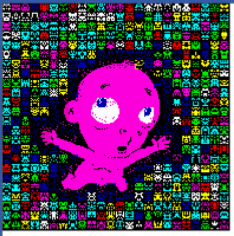
Holding down fire to "machete" your way through proceedings halves the speed of Maisie's movements, but unfortunately this doesn't help to preserve her lives either, as I've found the collision detection to be either unfairly weighted in favour of the game, or slightly off by at least one pixel. There are also some roaming nasties that seem to be un-macheteable. But, of course, the world doesn't have to make games easy for me, and the more ardent gamers amongst us could equally find this too easy, or wonder what I'm moaning about.

Despite this, there are randomly placed extra lives to find, which help, and if you move quickly enough, you can usually get through many screens without encountering something that is trying to kill you. Note also that in this game, the mushrooms should be avoided too, and can appear close to where you enter one part of the vast maze.

I do like what is done here overall, and I'm sure fans of Sabre Wulf in particular will appreciate this production as a fine tribute. It's not quite as good as Ultimate's classic, but there's something here to be enjoyed if you invest enough time in it.



It's always in the last monster-infested place you look.



I'm with Shaun regarding the difficulty. Only being able to fight horizontally means vertical corridors are tricky, and in addition things can spawn right on top of you. The best way round these frustrations is to repeatedly exit and come back until the room looks less hostile, which is a game feature I'd rather stayed in the 1980s. But all this goes with the territory for Sabre Wulf inspired games—it's the genre.

However, new information has come to light since release, and since Shaun's review. KTB Productions revealed that the snails & snakes flash when aligned with a key, vertically and horizontally respectively*. Armed with that knowledge, and the coordinates given on the screen, it's literally a game changer. It allows you to explore the maze (especially as someone has now mapped it) with more purpose than just wandering around the 16 possible key locations—easier said than done when a few instadeaths are never far away.

So after a bit of battle-hardening, Maisie Day is an enjoyable 160 screen treasure hunt that's even occasionally completable. It's been a 'way in' to a genre I've never been keen on, and for that I'm grateful. Even more so that it that doesn't have Ultimate's default key controls...

---

*Another nod to Sabre Wulf, where the tribesmen change colour when near an amulet

The Lost One

Jafma

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44585

Free

Well this is all very Lemmings isn't it? Well, *Lemming* to be more accurate, because you play the straggler, the one that couldn't keep up with your tribe during the great exodus from the cursed caves. Nobody likes a dawdler. Whenever you see hikers out on the hills, it might look all smiles & socks, but they're really hoping Bernard at the back would stop wheezing and get eaten by a wolf. Thankfully your tribesmen are more humane than the Ramblers Association, and have left some tools behind to help you catch up.

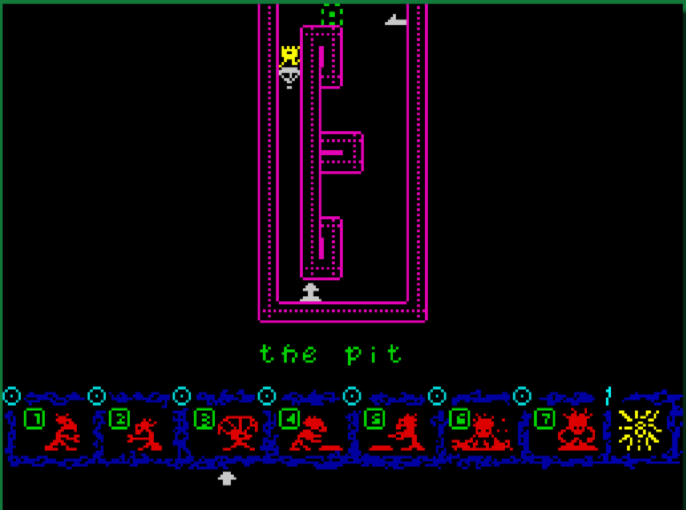
You're not actually a Lemming, you're a cute little yellow dude, but you can clearly see how it inspired the gameplay and the toolbar at the bottom. The provided instructions don't give much detail, so we've provided a handy boxout. You press the number when you want that thing to happen, and timing is everything. Occasionally, timing is nothing, because you are the dumbest & slowest. Not my words, but those of the instructions as an amusing get-out to cover the fact keypresses aren't always the most reliable. It means you can waste a vital tool and then the level is scuppered. However, it's not that common, and you get infinite continues and passwords so stop moaning.

The graphics and personality are all charming enough—arguably better than the Speccy Lemmings port—but the strength of the game is in the cave design. Almost all the levels hit the mark, and the fiendish ones are hard in a clever way, rather than by simply scaling everything up and overwhelming the player. There's a mix of headscratcher levels, and ones where the challenge is not working out what to do, but actually doing it.

It could do with a 'wait for keypress' at the start, as you get thrown in at the deep end and sometimes before you've so much as assessed the screen, you've been atomised by a lofty fall. So with this need for quick reflexes, it's almost as much an action game as a puzzler. Here's a cheeky tip though: you can BREAK into the BASIC as an ersatz pause, and then CONTINUE back to the game without any disruption of the screen.

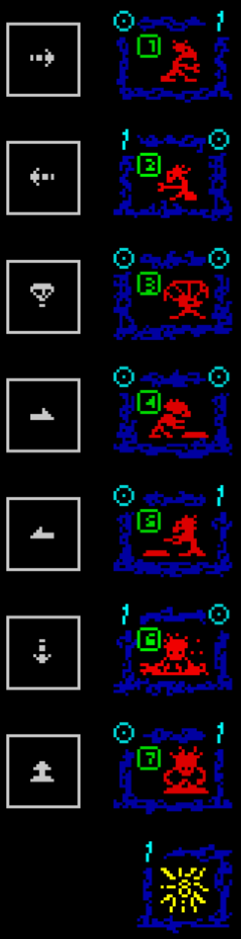
I did wonder if the levels could go that little bit further, that they were 95% and could somehow be turned up to 11. Well, the author has provided an excellent cave designer—the same one he used for game development. So if like me, you think you can do better, have a bash and discover you can't.

The Lost One is another nail in the coffee of people that say BASIC games aren't any good. I don't envy the Bytemaniacos competition judges this year.



The punishment for missed deadlines

Screen Icons Explained



Dig right and dig left. Press **1** or **2** when next to a red block and you will excavate until you hit clear space or an obstacle or perform another action.

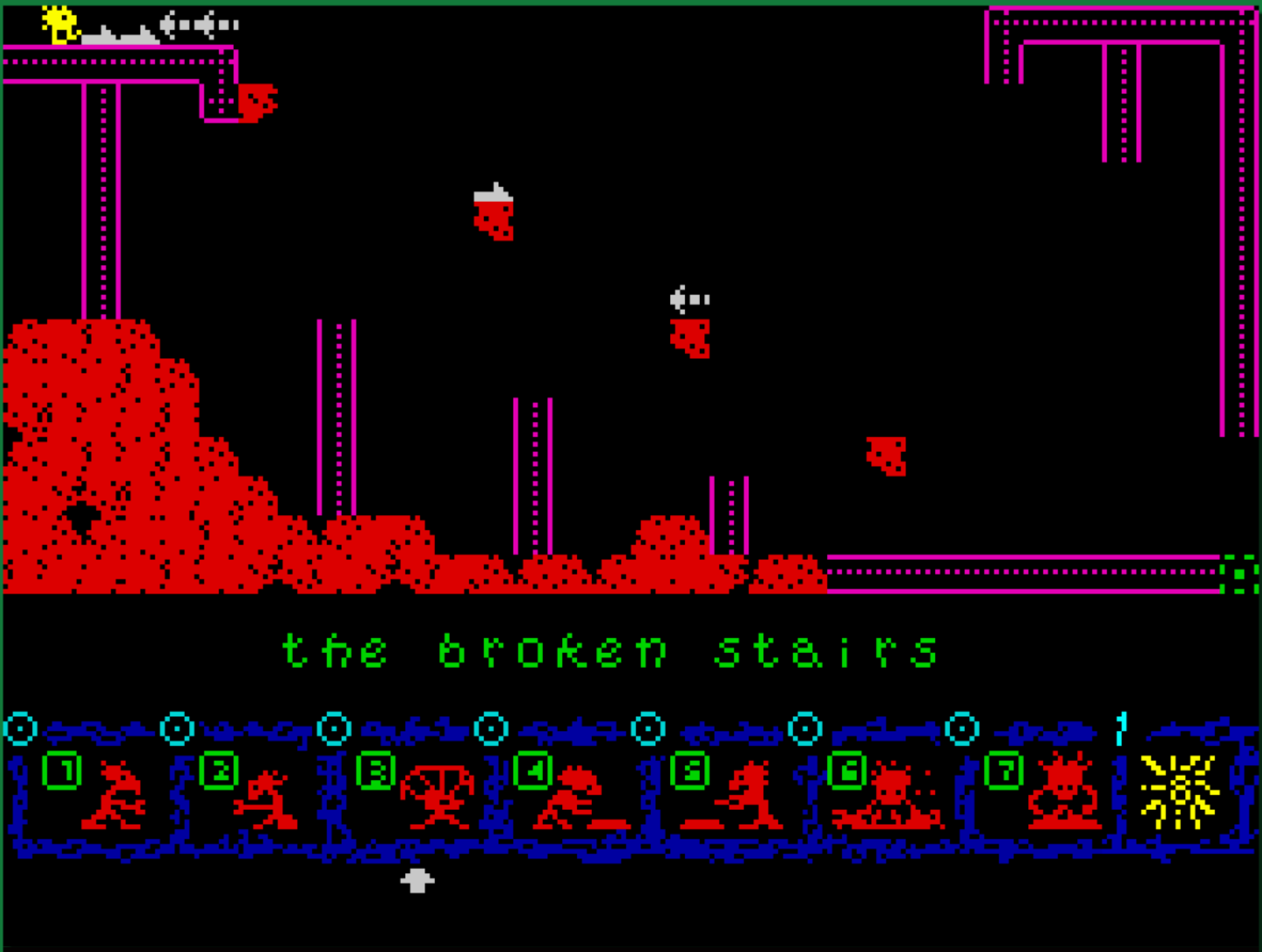
Press **3** to engage parachute for the bigger drops.

Press **4** to pave right, and **5** to pave left. You need to be already walking in that direction for it to work (remember the bias to the right. Time the keypress when you're about to step off a block. Very easy to get wrong.

Press **6** to dig vertically. You keep going through red brick until you hit empty space or an obstacle.

Press **7** to build upwards. You stand upon a growing vertical tower until you hit an obstacle or perform another action.

Press **8** for suicide when you get stuck. It returns to the menu.



Still safer than the Sinclair building staircase

Think Lemmings with Quick Time Events.

The original Lemmings is a classic game where you guide a hundred or so creatures to safety through a hostile landscape. TheLostOne is a bit different, as you only have one character to help. Sorry Dave, I see he is not a lemming at all. I mean this cute little yellow guy, of course.

To be honest, I was so bad at the original Lemmings that I often ended up with just one survivor by level three. So in a way, this focused approach is not entirely unfamiliar to me. What is different here are the short, single screen levels. In practice, this means obstacles come at you quickly, and you have to be ready to input a sequence of commands in a very short space of time. This is what I mean by quick time events.

The game was made with BASIC. My only gripe is that the keyboard response times feel a little sluggish. At first, I even thought the game was broken because it seemed unresponsive to my inputs. After I started pressing the keys more deliberately, I got the hang of it and discovered a real gem. It is a nice mix of puzzle and arcade action.

The combination of puzzle-solving and quick reflexes creates a real tension. I found myself so absorbed that I felt genuine anxiety about guiding "The Lost One" home - not an easy feat to accomplish in BASIC. This engaging level design is perfectly complemented by the cave editor, a great feature that lets you build your own levels. Its the kind of touch that is a real strength of BASIC game, and adds to the replayability factor.

All in all, TheLostOne is should find it's home in your retro gaming collection. It has certainly found one in mine.

Generals

Boris Makurin

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44491

Free

It's raining and, to be honest, I wasn't looking forward to firing up Boris Makurin's Generals. It's not the war theme, really. It's the fact that you play the general. The head guy. The one who stays safe while unnamed men—probably press-ganged and certainly lied to—march into meat grinders at your command, all to prove some abstract point.

The game pitches itself simply: a strategy game for one or two players where you explore a map, capture cities, mines, and factories, build armies, and wage war to prove you are the best General. Ah, yes. The noble justification for it all: to prove you're the best. Wonderful.

It's written in BASIC, so everything moves with the urgency of a sedated sloth. But I have to admit, the graphics perked me up—it's got a real Laser Squad aesthetic that's charming in its own blocky way. The potential is there. If this were compiled and the UI received some love, we could be talking about a real classic. But as it is, the sluggishness is a constant barrier.

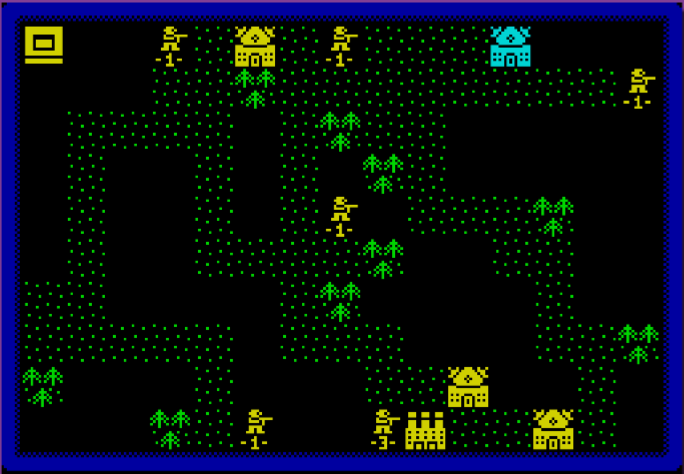
Then there are the controls. For reasons known only to the developer, you press 'L' to end your turn. 'L' is right next to 'K', which is the key you use to select your troops. You can see where this is going. I lost count of how many times I went to select a unit only to immediately end my turn, wasting all my moves. It's a spectacularly poor design choice that sucks all the strategy right out of the room.

When you finally push through the fatigue and start exploring, a glimmer of charm appears. Unveiling the map and discovering new locations has that classic, addictive pull. But it's a long slog to find that fun.

Generals isn't a bad game. It's a genuinely great effort in BASIC and shows what the platform can achieve. With compiled speed, and a rethink of those catastrophic keybindings, it could be something compelling.

But personally? I'd also rethink the theme. My initial reluctance never truly left me. Playing the power-mad egomaniac proving he's the "best" by wasting lives feels a bit too on the nose for current times. A well-worn trope it may be, but I'm not feeling it right now.

So, hats off to Boris Makurin for the technical achievement. It's impressive, and that's something I can genuinely salute. As for the game itself? Well, maybe I'm just a grumpy guy on a rainy day, but I've had my fill of generals. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go prove I'm the best at making a cup of tea instead. It's a much nobler pursuit.



Just like witches at black masses. RIP Ozzy.

I have to confess to having similar reservations to Jamie. Wartime strategy games aren't my thing at the best of times and we're not living in the best of times. On top of this, the instructions are in Russian* and the file is only available as a .trd that won't run on my trusty Next. It's like the universe is trying to stop me playing this one.

However, if playing games for Break Space has taught me anything, it's that there's usually something to be gained from broadening your horizons, so I'm diving in via an emulator.

Generals is a companion piece to "Attack", the author's other Yandex entry and hilariously it also uses tracks from Wham's Music Box, this time Club Tropicana.

You can play against the Speccy or a 2nd player, relying on your opponent not to take a sneaky peek at the screen on your turn. The overall aim is to expand your empire by capturing cities, mines and factories. I have to confess that I didn't find myself motivated enough to learn the tactics required for victory and ultimately lost.

Generals is something that is clearly a clever bit of coding, with plenty to offer strategy buffs. It's not one that'll win over newbies however and ultimately was too much of a battle for me. I take a little drop of milk & no sugar if you're offering, JB.

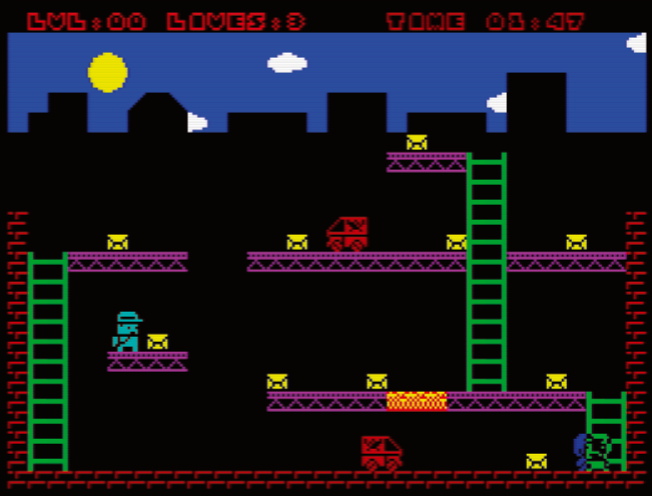
***Top tip: Select "2" from the first menu to get the instructions in English.**

Chuckie Mail

Proteusy

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44569

PWYW / $2



No ask Why. Just accept scaffold vans and lava.

What is it about well difficult platform games this issue? Are Speccy developers of 2D platform games mostly sadists these days? Well, a bit of unfair difficulty isn't going to stop me. Let's get into it.

Games involving a Postie aren't that common, though do exist: there are at least three Postman Pat games that I recall from the 1980s, and quickly searching the archives of SpectrumComputing.co.uk tells me of others, including one I didn't know about called Pat the Postman. Chuckie Mail is a very different beast to these: collect the mail, avoid patrolling post vans (which are oddly on platforms where they would otherwise have no business being), and birds, and also stay away from the manic roamers who have it in for you, and anything else that moves. There are platforms and ladders to travel around, and deadly firepits to avoid. Once each letter is collected, you progress to the next static screen level.

I've got to say that despite my opening protestations, the first two levels are easy enough, but the difficulty ramps up from level three onwards, which introduces moving and levitating platforms and other tropes that you'd expect from this sort of thing.

I find that the collision detection is usually slightly enthusiastically in favour of the game and against me, but at least my postie can fall from any height and live on. You're also able to manipulate his movements when falling too, which allows some shortcuts to platforms that'd otherwise be difficult to get to.

It's a fast and nifty arcade platformer with a pleasing aesthetic and some functional sound effects. The title screen declares "Keep it simple, keep it fun", which is what Chuckie Mail's developer, Proteusy, has done here. Try it now and experience what is likely the world's most dangerous postal collection run with this good, solid arcade romp.

A tribute, it says here, to Chuckie Egg. Talk about setting yourself a high bar. Ol' CE is one of the classics, a hugely popular 1983 trailblazer. So setting yourself up in that spotlight is a bold move.

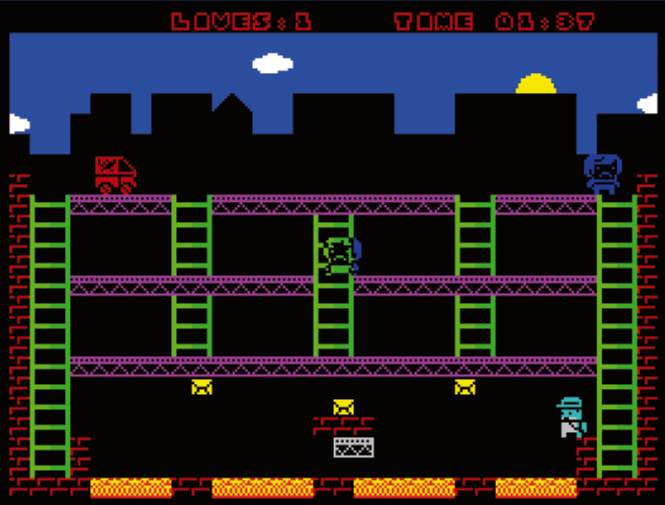
First off, I had a little go on Chuckie Egg, just for comparisons sake. It still, as the kids on my lawn might say, cooks. Of course it does. It's an egg.

Then It's Chuckie Mail time. Does it cook? Well. Kind of. It's certainly loud like its inspiration, pleasingly ticktacking every footstep and jump. The movement is fast and furious, with lots of backtracking to avoid your foes. But the unbiquitous air-control makes it a bit less Chuckie than it could be. Fall down a hole in the original and you were in trouble. Here, you can glide yourself to safety as often as not.

Mean collision detection, too, spoils the fun a little, and results seemed inconsistent when jumping off moving platforms, which made level 4 an absolute nightmare.

It's the small things then, which add up to take the sheen off. But then, I'm comparing this first-timer effort to a solid gold classic. That's not fair, but they started it.

On its own merits, this is a a fun, frantic platform game with a strong personality of its own. With a little revision to iron out some control issues, we could be onto a modern classic, but for now, it's still a pretty good time.



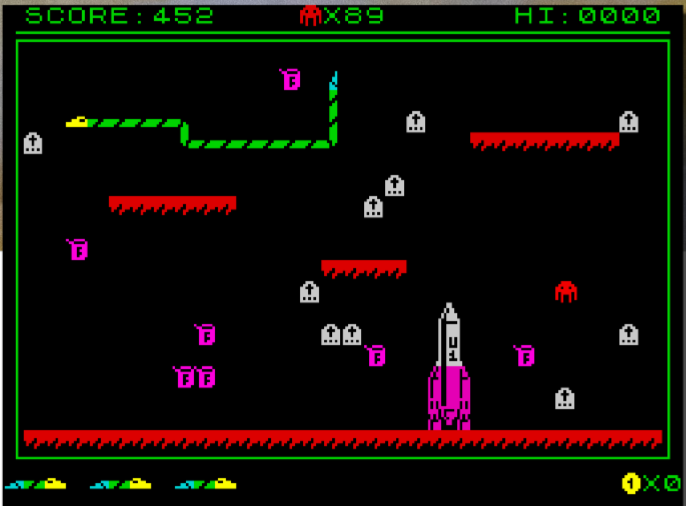
The dread level 4

ZXnake 2

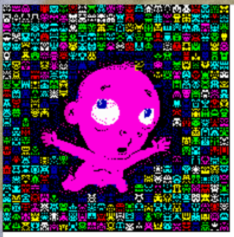
ZX Moe

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44564

Free



Any ZX Spectrum fans in the house?



If you put all the snakes head-to-tail from every Snake game played ever, they would be long enough to circle each planet in the solar system and then meander halfway to Alpha Centauri to bite the face of God*. That's a lot of snakes, so the disquiet around the Break Space watercooler about 'yet another Snake game' was understandable. The fact I've repeated the word "snake" several times in this paragraph is annoying enough.

But this is not your average Snake. It builds on its precursor 'ZXnake', a 2024 entry to the BASIC Ten Liners competition, and from that tiny reptile egg has grown a mighty sycamore. *(Biologically unlikely, but carry on - Ed)* ZXnake 2 is actually four games in one, as selectable options on the menu screen. They are based around the story of Cobretti & Pythonnia, two snakes head-over-tails in love, until an alien mothership kidnaps Pythonnia. All this is in the Spanish instructions, but it's beautifully played out as animated scenes in the game. The 'Adventure' mode sees Cobretti in an action game attempting to rescue his girlfriend, and 'Puzzle Rush' mode sees Pythonnia navigating some more cerebral levels to rescue herself.

There's also a Classic mode, which does a great job of the tried and tested 'snake eats apples and gets longer' thing; and Classic-ZX—a clever variant in which items you eat leave a gravestone behind. Power ups & power downs also appear, which you can collect to remove these obstacles, score points, get longer, get shorter, and more—including getting stoned. These all feature in the adventure and puzzle modes, plus teleports and other level specific treats. I haven't seen such depth and ingenuity in any Snake variant before.

So there is substance to the game, but there's lashings of gravy too. Several levels are homages to the Speccy classics, and the Pachinko bonus level is a moment to rest, cross your fingers and hope you land on extra lives.

Is ZXnake 2 trying to do too much, and spreading the ideas too thinly? Possibly, but only slightly. An expanded pure adventure or puzzle game would be most welcome, but that doesn't take away from the fact that this multipack is already among the best I've seen in the genre — and in 100% BASIC no less. What's more, after finishing the enhanced games, it left me with an appetite for the classic Snake that I've not had for some time. If ZXnake 2 is a jack-of-all-trades, it's one you'll want in your filofax.

A knock on the office door. 'Ed?' Dave's face poking around the doorframe. Here we are, with 50 games to review, and he's away from his workstation. We'll never get finished if he's wandering about wasting everyone's time. Exasperated, I sit up, push my pillow under the desk. 'What,' I say, 'could be so important that you've interupted my meditation time?'.

'Well, it's this ZXnake 2 game, you see.' He's wringing his cap in his hands, the Dickensian clot. 'Me and some of the team were just thinking that, well…' He stops, looks sideways for support that isn't there.
'Spit it out, boy!' I'm growing impatient by now. He has that effect.
'Well, Sir, we think it might be an Ace.'

My guffaws follow him as he scurries back down the corridor. An Ace! For a Snake game! The very idea! Still, I suppose I'd better check it out. They were right about Cindy Block earlier this issue, after all. But a *Snake* game. There are so many of them, it'd really have to do something special.

I load it up. It's in BASIC. Are they mocking me? But it moves very well. Character-based, but smooth. At no point do I feel like it's unresponsive or slow. My little snake, colourful and bright, moves along precisely, with character. The little Pacman-esque cut scenes are fun, the Pachinko bonus levels are a terrific, very modern feature. The levels are varied and clever, packed with details and rule exploits that add an almost puzzle-game feel to proceedings. The nostalgia-bait levels look great, and come with appropriate minor mechanics changes. Adventure mode is too short, if anything, I'd have liked a bit more. Which is not something I'd have expected to be saying.

Then the puzzle mode is a different beast - the snake stops at every snack, giving you time to plan ahead. Very clever. I like it. The other 2 modes are flavours of more regular Snake. Not much to report there - these are basically everything I would have expected from a decent, unremarkable Snake. Which means that the Adventure and Puzzle modes make it a *remarkable* Snake game. Which might mean… surely not?

This is the sort of madness that comes up when I miss my meditation time. It simply couldn't be. Could it?

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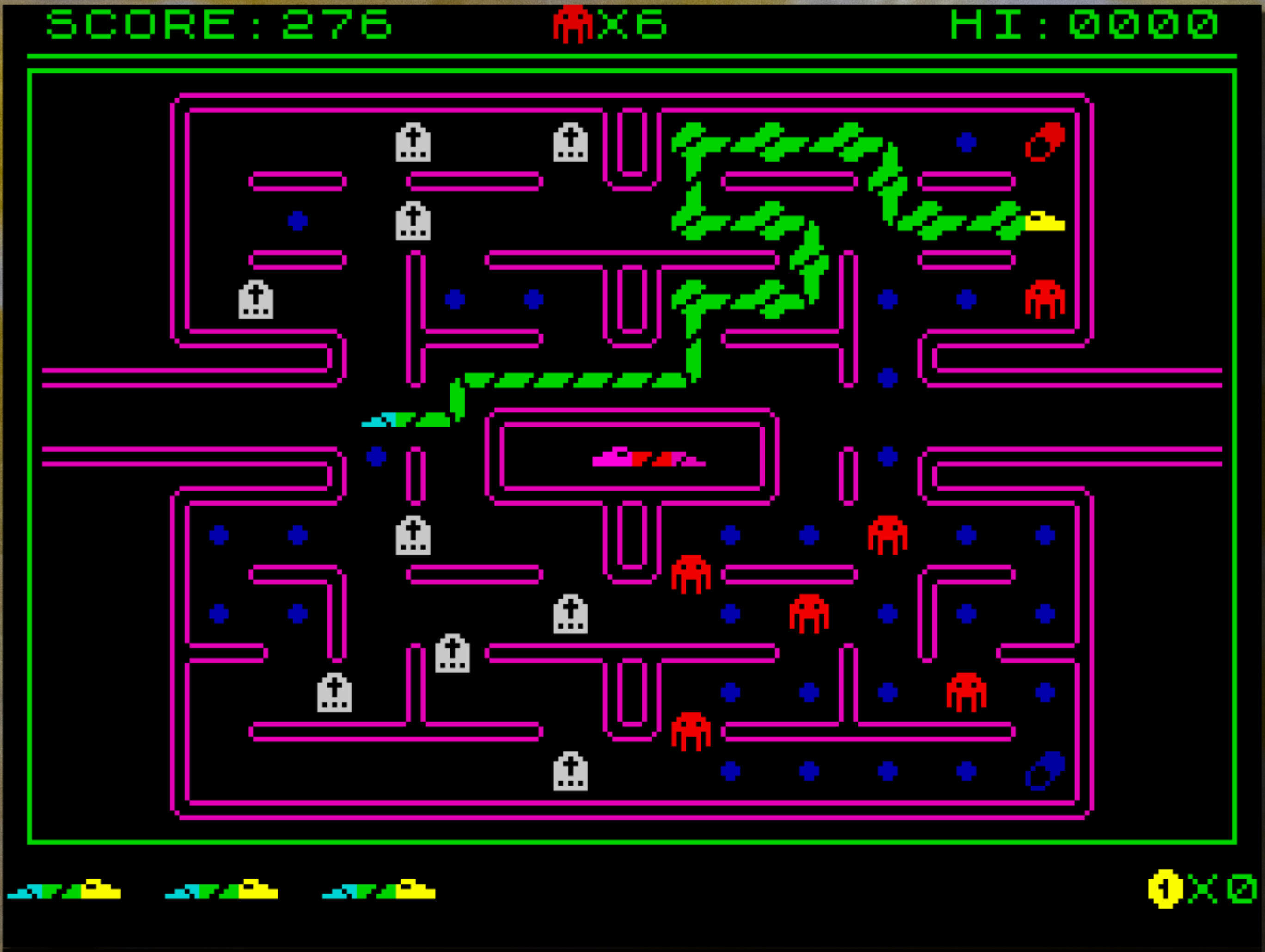
*An Ai chatbot said 300 million km, which is obviously rubbish, so I just made something up.



Not in 3-D

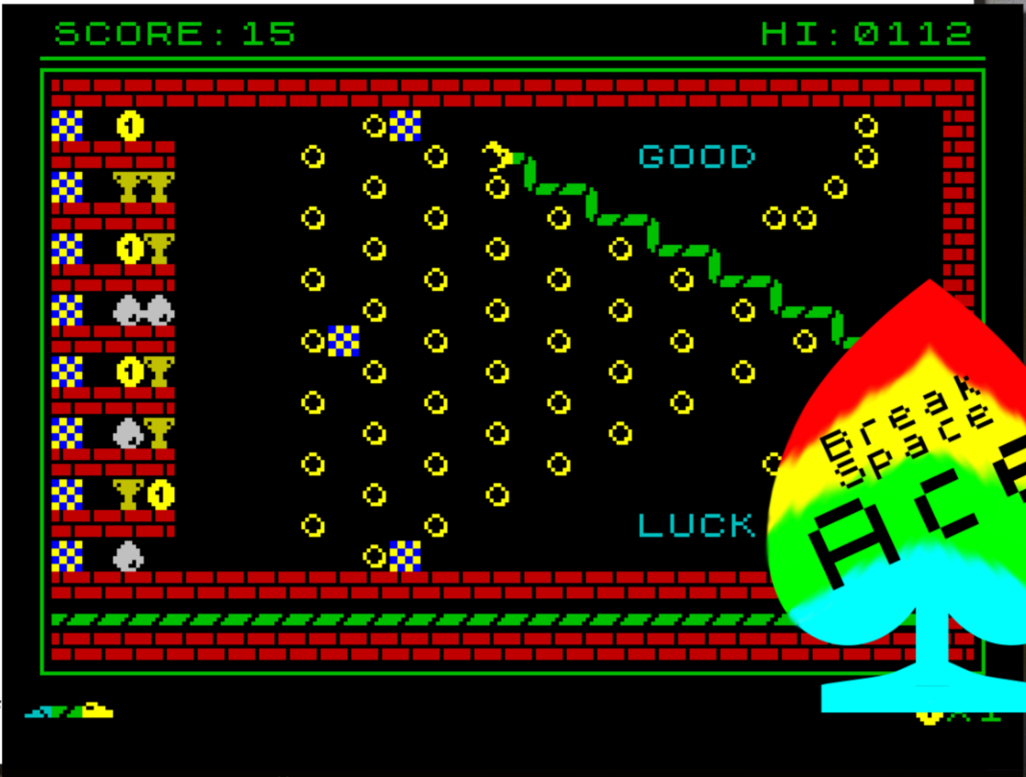
I like snake, I do. Manys an early 2000s bus journey was passed trying to max it out on my Nokia 3310. It's a fun little game but all this kerfuffle in the Ed's office about a new Snake title being a potential Ace is a bit silly really. I mean come off it, there are 85 Snake variants in the ZXDB alone and I think that's a gross underestimation.

Never one to prejudge a game however, I thought I'd better give ZXnake 2 a spin to reassure myself that the guys have just got a bit of post-Yandex delirium.

Upon immediately being entranced by the adorably colourful intro animation, I begin to worry that I might fall prey to the same spell. Two hours later confirmed it, this game is bloody brilliant.

Somewhere around the 6th puzzle you realise what an absolute gem this game truly is. There are so many neat touches, with beautiful graphics and a smoothness that belies its BASIC origins. Besides, I'm an absolute sucker for nostalgia bait (see https://sloanysoft.itch.io/janky-joe)

Honestly if Nokia had've stuck this killer app on their phones, your Apples and your Googles wouldn't have had a look in. It seems this is one snake that's charmed the lot of us and is well worthy of that Ace.



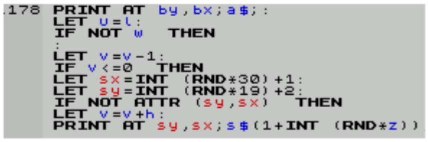
A bonus hands-off Pachinko level, where you spend coins collected.

BASICally Speaking

You might be surprised to learn that ZXnake 2 is made entirely in BASIC. We certainly were.
That's bona fide 100% BASIC—not compiled. And that makes it a serious contender for the pure BASIC category in the 2025 Bytemaniacos competition it's entered in. We recommend installing the excellent BASin on your computer and loading it up.
Grab that from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/tool/66/BASin.

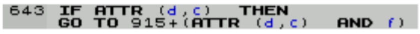
But the question remains : How the hell did ZXMoe make a game this big, run this fast? We spoke to him and he gave us some terrific pointers :

- Timing is everything. Certain operations are unavoidably slow, so carefully deciding where to hide them, and spreading them out is the key. Finding where to print power ups can be time consuming, as repeated searches may be needed when places are already occupied. The program only does it after the snake takes a bite and the game stalls for a short BEEP. Right after that, it checks one random square. (IF NOT ATTR) If that check is unsuccessful, then the square is occupied and the code will not keep looping until it finds somewhere, but will wait until the next bite. That way, it reduces any searching pause, and smooths it into part of the game when the player is already expecting a jolt. [LINE 1178]



```
178 PRINT AT by,bx;a$;:
    LET u=l:
    IF NOT w  THEN
    :
    LET v=v-1:
    IF v<=0  THEN
    LET sx=INT (RND*30)+1:
    LET sy=INT (RND*19)+2:
    IF NOT ATTR (sy,sx)  THEN
    LET v=v+h:
    PRINT AT sy,sx;s$(1+INT (RND*z))
```

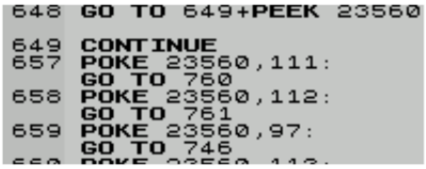
- Collision information is stored on the screen, close to hand. For example a FLASHing block is a portal, and specific colours are deadly, collectibles etc. This is a common technique and is faster than referring to a block map stored in memory. Thus we can use IF ATTR to directly query the screen memory. [LINE 643]



```
643 IF ATTR (d,c)  THEN
    GO TO 915+(ATTR (d,c)  AND f)
```

- Efficient coding when there are large numbers of options. Instead of running through multiple IFs, it goes directly to a destination by using a jump table e.g. GOTO line number + variable under test. [LINE 648]

- Also on line 648, we're using the LASTK system variable (23560) for keyreads instead of the slower INKEY$. Careful though : LASTK will not reset if a keys is released. You'll need to set it to 0 again to check for a new press. As the snake doesn't stop moving, that's just for this game. [LINE 648]



```
648 GO TO 649+PEEK 23560

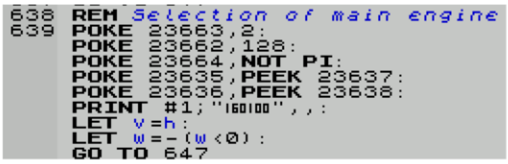
649 CONTINUE
657 POKE 23560,111:
    GO TO 760
658 POKE 23560,112:
    GO TO 761
659 POKE 23560,97:
    GO TO 746
```

- Minimising 'on the fly' calculations and referring to precalculated tables when required. For example, there are pre-defined tables of exactly which head, body and tail to draw based on the last event. These are calculated during development, and the result SAVEd on to the tape. Thus, the code to generate the tables doesn't need to be included or executed in the final version, just the resulting definitions. These don't take up so much space, and can be accessed very efficiently.

- Embedding control codes in strings and storing strings as variables which get processed faster. This is when you put invisible instructions inside text and say e.g. "LET a$=". You've probably already done this yourself—it's when you change the colour of the letters inside a string as you type it (then it annoyingly changes the colour of the whole listing that follows!). You can include more than just colours though: the control code for AT is CHR$ 22, following by row & column. See page 105, 114 & 183 of the BASIC manual for more. [LINE 1392]

- POKEing the system variables OLDPPC and OSPCC (23662 & 23664), which tell the CONTINUE command where to continue back to. It happens to be faster than GOTO, so if you need to regularly go to a specific line number, you can trick it to CONTINUE to that given line instead. You can see those values being POKEd at multiple places {LINE 85, 348, 628 etc.]

- POKEing the PROG system variable (23635/6) to point to the first line of the game engine, rather than the very start of the whole program. This helps because the BASIC has fewer lines to step through to find where it needs to be. If you have a program starting at line 1 and you GOTO 1000, it will step through every line until it reaches 1000. So if you trick the BASIC into thinking it starts at line 900, it has much less to sift through. Frequently at the start of a section, the lines are POKEd with the value of the NXTLIN variable. For example LINE 639 sets the target at LINE 640, so earlier lines can ignored by the GOTO on line 648



```
638 REM Selection of main engine
639 POKE 23663,2:
    POKE 23662,128:
    POKE 23664,NOT PI:
    POKE 23635,PEEK 23637:
    POKE 23636,PEEK 23638:
    PRINT #1;"160100",,:
    LET v=h:
    LET w=-(w<0):
    GO TO 647
```

- Customising each game engine and not sharing code where bottlenecks can occur. For example the main loops are separate for different game modes. At the beginning of each of thes sections, the variables mentioned above (OLDPC, PROG etcetera) are refreshed. [Lines 347, 638, 627]

- Using FIFO (first in first out) for the snake logic using PEEK and POKE in a reserved memory space. Using strings or DIM arrays would really slow things down. [Lines 644 & 645]

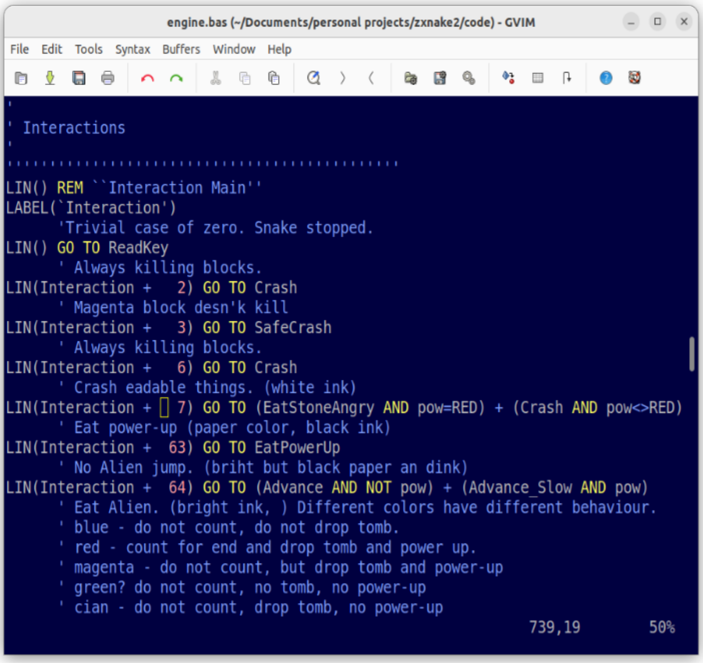
- Don't use REM statements where speed is critical. It's an extra line that needs processing and also takes up memory. Every little helps.

- Even the big scrolling message at the end credits is in BASIC. The vertical scrolling is achieved using DEF FN and its DEFADD system variable (23563). Normally, when you use the DEF FN statement, it uses the memory address pointed to by DEFADD to store its information. You can POKE this variable to make DEF FN operate anywhere in memory—including the screen. So you make the BASIC 'think' it's copying strings, when it's really moving graphics up the TV. And when things scroll up, you need to add new graphics at the bottom. ZXMoe does this using LPRINT (normally used with the Sinclair bogroll printer) to prepare the next line offscreen and copying it in, one line at a time, synchronised to the scrolling. [See 'Ending.bas]

On environments :

The basic screen captures above are from BASIN, a handy tool for writing and debugging BASIC on Windows.

ZXMoe doesn't develop natively in Sinclair BASIC as such - he uses the powervful vim / gvim editor on Linux. As you can see from the screen to the right, he enriches his code using the m4 macro language, so it doesn't look quite like BASIC until it is parsed out to a .bas file for loading into a Speccy. As he's defining his own macros and shortcuts, the code is easier to read and work with. And on modern machines, the time taken to filter the code out to Speccy-readable form is almost instantaneous.


engine.bas (~/Documents/personal projects/zxnake2/code) - GVIM
File
Edit
Tools
Syntax
Buffers
Window
Help

```
'
' Interactions
'
'''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''''
LIN() REM ``Interaction Main''
LABEL(`Interaction')
      'Trivial case of zero. Snake stopped.
LIN() GO TO ReadKey
      ' Always killing blocks.
LIN(Interaction +   2) GO TO Crash
      ' Magenta block desn'k kill
LIN(Interaction +   3) GO TO SafeCrash
      ' Always killing blocks.
LIN(Interaction +   6) GO TO Crash
      ' Crash eadable things. (white ink)
LIN(Interaction +   7) GO TO (EatStoneAngry AND pow=RED) + (Crash AND pow<>RED)
      ' Eat power-up (paper color, black ink)
LIN(Interaction +  63) GO TO EatPowerUp
      ' No Alien jump. (briht but black paper an dink)
LIN(Interaction +  64) GO TO (Advance AND NOT pow) + (Advance_Slow AND pow)
      ' Eat Alien. (bright ink, ) Different colors have different behaviour.
      ' blue - do not count, do not drop tomb.
      ' red - count for end and drop tomb and power up.
      ' magenta - do not count, but drop tomb and power-up
      ' green? do not count, no tomb, no power-up
      ' cian - do not count, drop tomb, no power-up
                                                          739,19        50%
```

REDM : New Orleans

Mnube/Flame Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44402

€1.99

You are a hungry vampire detective/agent working for a shady organisation in 2008 New Orleans. If that sentence doesn't draw you in, then this game isn't for you.

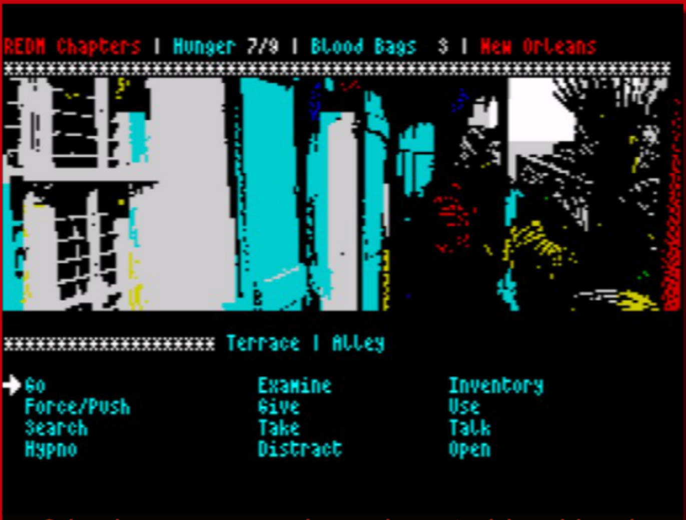
Built upon a modified version of the Choose Your Destiny engine (by Cronomantic, a.k.a. Sergio Chico), REDM New Orleans, Chapters: Episode 1 is an unusual beast. It's a text-based puzzle adventure at heart – and a very atmospheric one – but comes with some quirks. Unlike classic text adventures, there's no 'hunt the verb' parser: everything is navigated from a selection of 12 words. In play, this feels like the early LucasArts SCUMM point-and-click games – sometimes leaving you wondering why some of the words are there at all. When will I get to use 'hypno'? This is no bad thing – Monkey Island and Day of the Tentacle were great games.

We're also presented with digitised pictures, which are rather attractive and add a distinctive aesthetic. They do, however, impact memory usage and – despite being a 128K-only title – having these images necessitates less verbose descriptions of locations. This is partly mitigated by many locations displaying a code: if you look it up in the accompanying PDF, you'll find extra flavour text and background. It's suggested that this isn't essential, but I'd argue it really is. In fact, if I'm honest, I'd have preferred the extra text in-game instead of some of the pictures. That said, the ceremony of looking up a code in the PDF evokes memories of using the feelies that came with Infocom's classic adventure games such as Zork, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy or Leather Goddesses of Phobos.

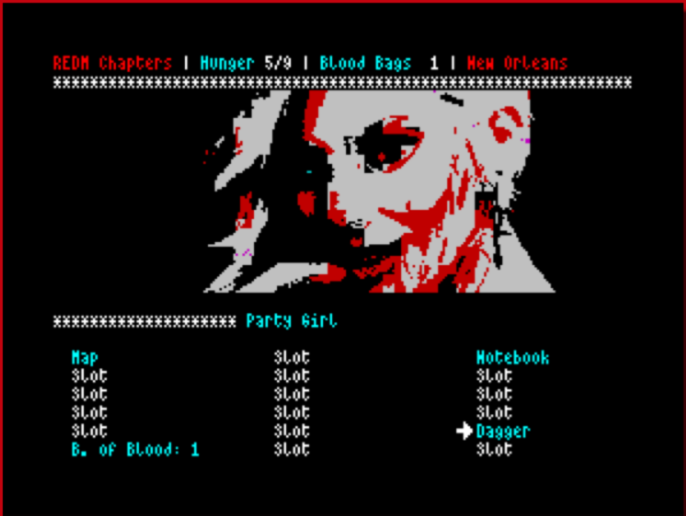
Navigating the game isn't just a case of exploring locations and trying to combine everything with everything (though there is a bit of that). You also have a couple of stats – most notably, your hunger, which must be managed. You're a vampire, after all. Carefully rationing those blood bags, or finding other sources of sustenance, in order to maintain the strength to attempt vampiric feats is essential.

Mentioning LucasArts and Infocom classics highlights the breadth of ambition here, but there are a few rough edges that need mentioning. Firstly, this is Chapter 1. Apparently Chapter 2 is coming and will complete the story, but it isn't out yet. More jarringly, some unusual wording choices betray the game's translation into English. For instance, the menu option "desist" (used for 'go back') feels odd, and the instruction manual doesn't quite match the game: the keys aren't QAOP as stated, but WSOP. The author has released updates when issues have been pointed out, and has now made the game free until the sequel is released, so there's little excuse not to give it a try.

At around 30 locations, REDM isn't huge (for reference, The Hobbit had 80), but there are evocative illustrations for each one, and the overall strangeness of the package is nicely unsettling. The tone is closer to Vampire: The Masquerade than Buffy, and the exploration of both world and story will keep you playing. Recommended.



3 bedrooms, sea view, close to blood bank



Claret everywhere, Guvnor.

A game shouldn't feel this edgy without being X-Rated, but REDM manages it with ease. With references linking vampires, shadowy cults, & the Whitechapel murders, it's redolent of horror stories like 'From Hell' and 'The Da Vinci Code'.

The game is not without its quirks, but the UI is technically sound and leaves you in no doubt what the options are. That doesn't make it easy though—far from it. The large inventory and number of actions gives you a lot of things to try, often fruitlessly in my case. So there's interesting puzzles to solve, given extra depth by having to keep on top of your 'hunger' and exertions.

I can see where Andy's coming from about preferring more text to images, but on balance I'd keep them. Depending on your taste, they are either digitised to abstraction, or beyond recognition. Either way, they do make the game feel more foreboding than UDGs ever could (though I'd be happy to be proved wrong on that).

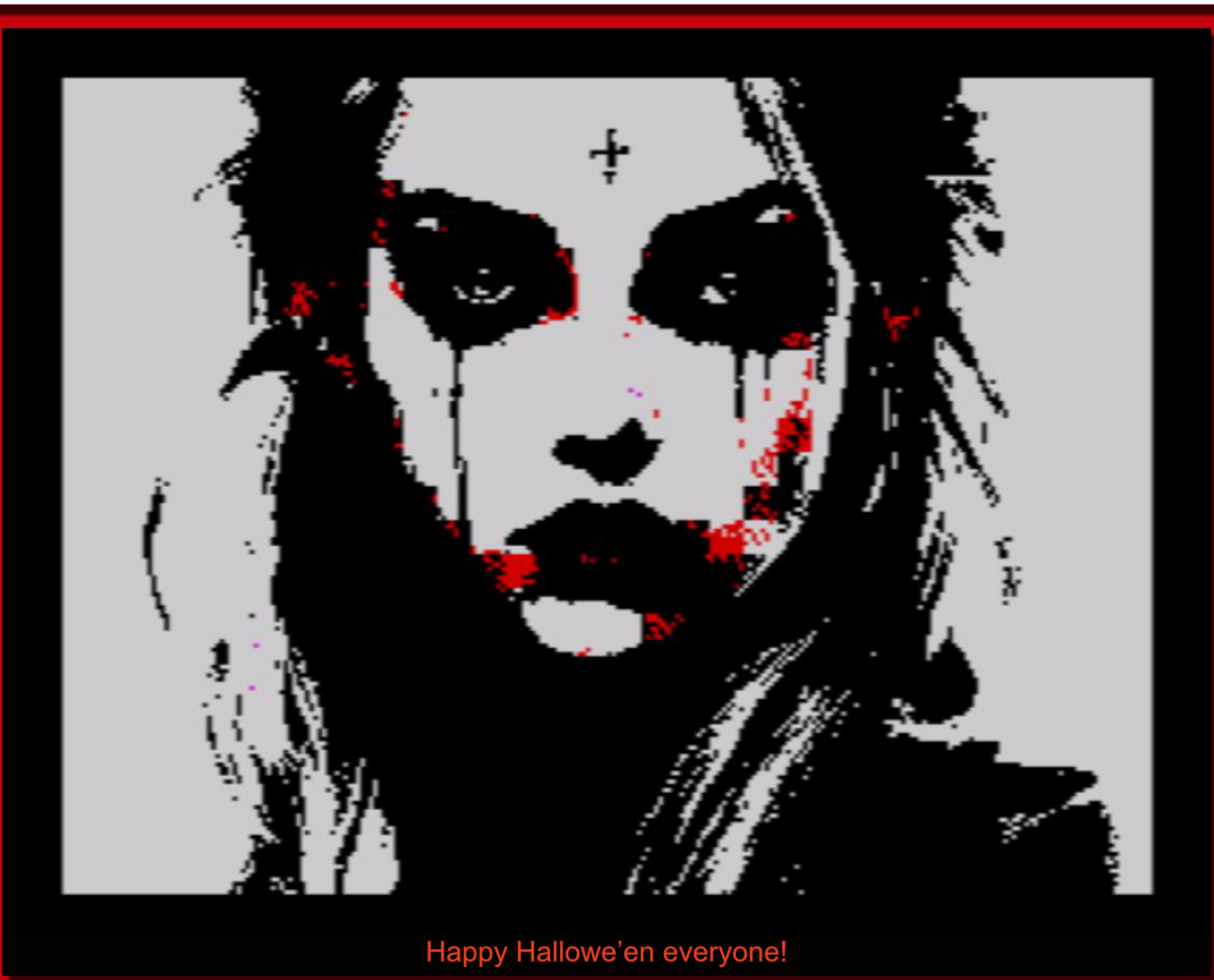
REDM is breath of fresh air. Custom built adventures are rare these days, and menu driven ones even more so. While I did flounder, there's enough here to keep me playing and look forward to chapter 2, but I hope it starts with a novella style solution to chapter 1.

Ah, the unlife of a vampire detective! Stylishly stalking the New Orleans nightlife, necking dissolute goths, Sisters of Mercy swelling in the soundtrack as you… rummage through a row of bins. The game doesn't explicitly specify whether we're playing as a vampire raccoon, I suppose.

Early dissonance aside, there's a great atmosphere here, expressed through excellent, moody digitised imagery. The Lucasarts style interface works with some caveats (do we need Examine *and* Search?) , but the puzzles are often less a matter of figuring out what to do, and more how to do it. Different interface, different design challenges.

Using in-game references to text in the manual is clever, and tremendous copy-protection if you ever find yourself flung back in time to the 1980s. I didn't feel like progress was hampered by not checking the text - but there's flavour and context there.

This is a strong and ambitious title, which maintains a steady tone throughout. Just the thing for these darkening winter nights.



Happy Hallowe'en everyone!

Manic Mailers

Got something Spectrum-related on your mind? Got any comments on the magazine? Disagree with a review? Spotted a typo? Upset about too many colours? Think the Resolution is too low / too high? Confused about your car insurance?

Simply drop us a line at BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com

I need answers, dammit!

Hi Break Space team!

Loving the issues so far. A hilarious and thoroughly entertaining read! Top work guys!!

I have one small suggestion. As I only managed to answer a pathetic 10 clues in the 1st issue crossword (and an even more pathetic less than that in the 2nd issue), any chance the solution to the crosswords be published in subsequent issues?

Cheers,
Nick Lloyd, via e-mail

**How could we have missed that! It's almost like we're a bunch of blasted amateurs around here.
Answers to the Issue 1 and 2 Crosswords are printed in this issue, and the Issue 3 solution will follow next time.**

A Roanite Writes

Fantastic! Awesome to see Chapell Roan taking time out from the Pink Pony Club to review a Speccy game!
Keep up the brilliant work and thank you for posting on CSS.

Cheers
Pierre, on comp.sys.sinclair

Honestly, we were worried about finding a suitable Diva to match up against Ms. Roan's guest spot last time, but Phil's a pretty good get. His hips aren't what they were, but he can still put on a show.

Iberian Aggro

Hello!

On page 84 of BreakSpace issue 2, Echoes of the Future review, Mpk said the author, Daniel Revenga, used AI translation from his native Portuguese to English. Unless Spain is now part of Portugal (not a chance, go away you paella eaters!!!!!), he clearly confused the language.

So, I hereby claim a trainspotting award. What are you going to do about that?

Warm regards,
André Luna Leãobody, via email

**First, it's at least nice to know that people are reading all the way through. Page 84? Almost there! Also good to know that we have an opportunity to get involved in some regional tensions, if only by accident. As with any editorial blunder, Mpk would like to make clear that responsibility for the error lies with Sir Alan Sugar. We apologise on his behalf.
We did ask Phil if he had any Trainspotting awards left, but he'd recently sold the last one to finance his Labubu cravings. Unlucky.**

Glossary

'What are these awful nerds talking about?', you may ask yourself. Fair question.

If you're not yet quite fully immersed in the Spectruverse, there may well some terminology that needs explaining.

Let's try.

Omni

Shaun has one of these, and he does like to mention it, mostly in the context of having to enter POKEs to get games to launch on it. Not the best advertisement.

But still, the Omni is a very braggable piece of kit. It's a hardware ZX Spectrum laptop, with a proper clamshell fold-down screen that nestles up against the rubber keys of the classic 48k chassis. Starting at a very reasonable $200, it comes with a 128k of RAM, 2 joystick ports, HDMI out, a 9" screen, an SD card interface, and wifi connectivity. And a variety of colours.

Perhaps the most ostentatious way to show off your Speccy street-cred.

https://retroradionics.com/OMNI-128HQ-LAPTOP-p75106221

The Shaky Game

Shakin' Stevens was the Welsh Elvis, and not the drunk, fat Vegas Elvis either, the cool snake-hipped early Elvis. He wrote and performed a string of 50's style rock songs through the early 80's and frankly owned the UK pop charts for half a decade. You'll know him best for his perennial 'Merry Christmas Everyone'.

So naturally, he got a video game, given away free as a b-side on some of his records.

It's terrible, but has contributed the phrase 'Oh Dear. A Bat Bit You' to every keen Spec-chum's vocabulary.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BnPV9f_Ue4

TR-DOS

The most important thing about TR-DOS is that the default extension for disk images is .TRD. Which will never not make me laugh.

But more seriously, TR-DOS is a **D**isk **O**perating **S**ystem for the Spectrum, released in 1984 by a company named **T**echnology **R**esearch. It enabled support for 3rd-party disk interfaces. 5.25" and 3.5" floppys were supported. These naturally allowed for much faster and more reliable loading and saving when compared to cassette tapes.

With the arrival of the ZX Spectrum +3 in 1987, with its built-in standard disk interface, it would have faded into obscuity, except a version of it was by then in wide use in the Eastern block, supporting machines like the Pentagon and Scorpion. As a result of that, it's an ongoing standard for many disk releases even today.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TR-DOS

Hold My Hand (Very Tightly)

A song in which our hero, Whistlin' Rick Wilson, enjoins his lady love to hold his hand. When she asked the exact pressure which she should exert in this act, Whistlin' Rick was, like Julie Andrews' diction, crystal clear. OOOOooooOOOOoooo!

https://youtu.be/YDW9jHrobnE

The End

again

Well, we're exhausted.

58 games, eh? We weren't expecting that.

Hopefully you're not exhausted from reading it all.

Feedback is important for a project like this, so please feel free to drop us a line at BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com with any comments, criticism, feature ideas, personal insults, whatever takes your fancy.
There's no way you agreed with everything.

We're also on Bluesky as @breakspace.bsky.app

Thanks for reading! Issue 4 is on the way.

Mpk

Next Time :

Even more reviews, including :
Star Carrier Ruffian (yes, we said that last time. Sorry.)
S1ncla1r C1ty
Speccy Saga
Puppies Rescue
...and more!

Plus whatever we can come up with in the meantime.

Keep your eyes open for the Winter edition coming to an itch.io near you in January 2026

0 OK, 10:4

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